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#53

AN EXPLOSIVE INTERVIEW WITH WRITER
DOUG MURRAY

'NAM ARTIST
WAYNE VANSANT
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– NO FLAK!

TALKS WITH THE FOLKS BEHIND
REAL WAR STORIES

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

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— Don Thompson
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art & colors

UP FRONT

Real War

"They took a clean-cut kid, and made a killer out of him, that's what they did..." sings **Bob Dylan** on his recent EMPIRE BURLESQUE album.

It's easy for comics publishers to take brave stands on such "controversial" issues as drug abuse and missing children. But where's the controversy? It's like debating nuclear war — where's your opposing side? "Um — after careful deliberation, I've decided to come out in favor of nuclear war. And I'm all for missing children and drug abuse, too."

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Eclipse Comics has recently taken a stand on an underexposed and highly controversial issue — Real War. I congratulate them, and only hope other publishers have the balls to follow suit.

This isn't Sgt. Rock or Rambo, but Ollie North we're talking about — the real thing here. One day you're checking out the latest X-MEN and the next you're checking into the most efficient meat-packing unit in America — the War Machine. The American militia, like that of most other nations, churns out truckloads of self-sustaining propaganda to lure its victims. Take a half-hour to read REAL WAR and get a glimpse of the rest of the story — especially those of you of draft age. If your retailer's out of stock, write Eclipse. Take the opportunity to learn how people just like you have gone through the grinder and survived to tell about it.

— Mark Borax
Managing Editor

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"We want to show just how uncomfortable

DOUG MURRAY

Doug Murray has a softspoken way of putting grim events into sobering perspective. He was there, he lived through it, and I wonder whether he ever dreamed he'd return to write about it all in a best-selling Marvel comic book? I think you'll find his in-depth interview fascinating.

DWIGHT JON ZIMMERMAN: *Were you surprised that Marvel decided to go with THE 'NAM?*

DOUG MURRAY: A bit. As you've heard me say before, I tried to do the same sort of thing for DC some years back. It just wasn't time — '72 was a bad time to do Vietnam stories because Vietnam was still going on, to a certain extent, and we were in the **Nixon** years and that was not a good subject. It was a really taboo subject. DC didn't do it and they had good reasons because at the time, the war was still going on and it was a pretty hot subject. When **Larry Hama** came to me to do the SAVAGE TALES stories, he wanted to do realistic Vietnam stories. I still thought that might be the case, and this was in 1984 or thereabout; but when SAVAGE TALES #1 hit the stands and we started to get letters back it was apparent, from the form of the letters and the age of the people writing them, that maybe there was a market for this sort of thing. When I was asked to put together a prospectus for a comic book based on Vietnam, six months later or so, I wasn't really surprised because I had seen what kind of letters and what kind of response we'd gotten to the Vietnam stuff in SAVAGE TALES. If I was surprised at anything it was the whole SAVAGE TALES concept, of doing it there. But once we proved in SAVAGE TALES that people would read it, it was not necessarily a shock that someone would do a comic on it. I didn't expect the comic to be successful, but that's another thing entirely.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Doug Murray
Born: 13 November 1947 — Brooklyn, NY
Residence: Long Island
Occupation: Writer
Credits: More articles than anything else, for such magazines as FAMOUS MONSTERS; FILMLAND; MONSTER TIME; MILLIMETER; TAKE ONE; and others of that type. I ghosted some novels for Pinnacle. I did material for DC back in the early '70s, very little of which actually saw print but some of which I got paid for. And for Marvel I've done SAVAGE TALES and THE 'NAM and THE MERC. I have a couple of other projects in the works at Marvel, including a 'NAM graphic novel, which may get a go, if we get a decent artist.
Unrealized Ambition as a Writer: I read a lot of science fiction and adventure stuff as a hobby. I'd like to write science fiction novels that are at least a step above the normal space adventure, potboiler stuff — that is the staple of the field even today. I'd like to think that I could do a people story in a science fiction format and make it successful, and maybe one of these days I'll sit down and take the time and do it.
Most Annoying Question Ever Asked In An Interview: A couple of guys have asked if I'm giving any of the money I make from THE 'NAM to veterans organizations, which I find kind of presumptive, and has nothing to do with what we're supposed to be talking about.

DWIGHT: *Did you initially plan it to be like a limited series, or did you go for broke and say on going?*

DOUG: Larry and I always figured on doing it for the maximum time possible. We wanted to do it in the "real time" format right from the start, that was a given, and being as I picked 1966 as a starting point, that kind of limited us to a period of eight to nine years, until the American pullout, so in a way it was a limited format. But your talking eight years, that's not real limited. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *How much of your experience has actually been translated in the comic books?*

DOUG: Not a great deal, I try to avoid that as well. I do things for pieces of background or some color or some flavor of the book from my own experiences. The idea of the base getting hit with a rocket attack while they were watching a movie was something that happened at Da Nang in my first couple of weeks in country. There's a thing in #6 involving an ambush that happened to me in country. There's some stuff in #3, where they're in Saigon, that happened to me. But it's like bits and pieces and I'm using it as background rather than foreground stuff. I don't want the book to be about **Doug Murray** and his adventures in Vietnam. I'm trying to avoid that at all costs.

DWIGHT: *You stated your feelings about not glorifying war, yet there are many people in the military who do glory in the fact of war.*

DOUG: Well, that's a different story. *(Loud television noise.)* Hang on just a minute, Dwight, I'll close the door.

DWIGHT: *Okay.*

(One moment later.)

DOUG: I mean **Oliver North** is a fine example of a person who believes in the glory of war. I don't know if he glorifies it *perse*, but he certainly sees it as a glory thing, you know. I have a character up-

All art accompanying this interview is © 1987 M.E.G., unless otherwise noted.

and unpleasant and nasty war really is."

"Oliver North believes in the glory of war," says Doug, adding that officers like him often got "fragged" in Vietnam — blown up by their own men.

coming named Marty Olarnik, the officer who takes Lt. Fanelli's place in issue #14, and he's a prime example of a young officer who believes in the glories of war and the wonders of military service and making a career out of it and getting a real good head count and all of the good things that officers of that time, of that nature really thought about, and for three or four issues as we follow him around we see that. What essentially he accomplishes because of his views is (A) he consistently gets people killed that don't have to get killed, and (B) he doesn't really accomplish what he's trying to accomplish because he gets people killed and therefore he doesn't get quite as much effort out of his people as he should.

The guys who have this glory of war, **George Patton** type, thing tend to leave tremendous swatches of death and bloodshed around them, and it's not always the enemy's death and bloodshed. There's a kind of uncaringness about people who feel that way and it translates into mistakes in judgement and wacko judgement that leads to casualties. My own experience from war was that when you got an officer or an NCO that was into that whole death, glory, "come back on your shield" or whatever stuff, it's a really dangerous situation. Those were the guys that got fragged or didn't make out as well as they should have.

DWIGHT: *What do you mean by fragged?*

DOUG: Well, fragged is a military term of sorts: when an officer or NCO got to be really dangerous to his troops, or causes a lot of casualties and the Army doesn't really take care of it — and the Army does have a way of kind of taking care of its own in that situation, a lot of those guys get pulled out or put in a situation where they can't hurt anybody — but once in awhile you get a situation where a young lieutenant is trying to make a name for himself, and he's working for a captain who's *always* trying to make a name for himself, and he'll end up staying in the field for a long time and get a lot of people killed, and, well, fragging is kind of a way of adjusting the situation. It was a question of usually a fragmentation grenade being tossed in a guy's window when he was asleep at night, or something of that nature, where he would literally be killed by his own people. It happened a lot in Vietnam, much more than in Korea and World War II. I really shouldn't say a lot. It happened often enough to be noted by just about everybody. I don't know if that's the same as a lot, I kind of hope not, but certainly it happened enough to be a real part of the Vietnam War.

DWIGHT: *Do you think that this sort of situation and other negative things that occurred in Vietnam were ... let me rephrase this: for instance in World War II, the political lines were far more clear-cut and defined — the Japanese had attacked us and we were defending the world against Japanese encroachment and the domination of Nazism — whereas in Vietnam we initially had the similar type of high sounding political belief of containing the world against communism, but that started really sounding hollow — did this really start bringing out a lot of bitterness with the troops, and cynicism?*

DOUG: There was more to it than that. There are other reasons people don't normally think about. One of the easiest things to look at is that in Vietnam you went over there for a year, thirteen months at most, a limited amount of time, whereas in World War I and World War II and

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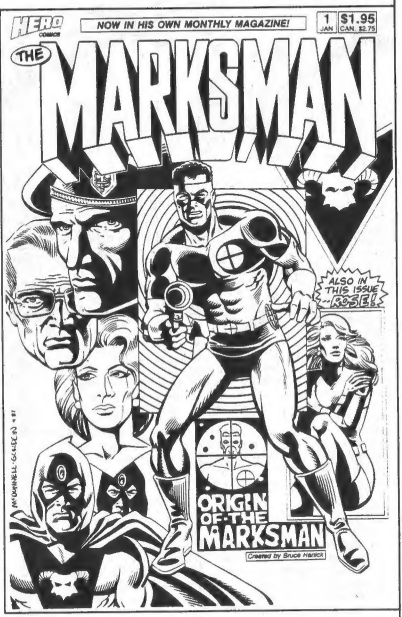

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"It was essentially a war of minorities."

even in Korea you were sent over for the duration. You were in the war until it was over and so you had a vested interest in kind of trying to do something to win. In Vietnam the vested interest was in surviving for twelve months, so there's a difference in attitude. In the Vietnam War people were counting days and doing everything to avoid as much action as possible. Days didn't mean anything to the guys in World War II, it was a question of finishing the war one way or the other; so if he were to avoid the action he would therefore elongate the war, that would be a negative thing for him.

I think that's what also led to the fragging incidents and things like that; if you had an officer who was likely to get you hurt or killed and you were only going to be in country for six months, it was to your advantage to get rid of that guy. In World War II the length of combat time would kind of take care of it by itself. An officer who was not respected by his men would not survive in World War II, simply because he had to be with them all of the time, whereas Vietnam, with the turnover of troops, that was a different situation.

Also, the political situation obviously came into play, especially towards '67, '68, '69 — which is the period I'm starting to get into in the comic now — when . . . I don't know the exact terminology, it was essentially a war of minorities. Because of the way the draft system has been set up in the States, the guys with more bucks went to college and got their student deferments and didn't get drafted and didn't end up in Vietnam, and the guys who couldn't afford that *did* get drafted, and if you got drafted you were certainly going to go to Vietnam. So the Army started to change complexion from '62, '63, '64, when the troops in 'Nam were elite type troops — they were advisors from Special Forces — guys that had training and were really motivated people — then to '66, '67 when you had a kind of a mix between the regular Army types, the career boys, the really motivated soldiers who were in the Army because they wanted to be. And then you started getting the trickling in of guys who felt they'd been screwed by the country because they were getting drafted and sent to Vietnam when guys who may have lived on the same block or in the same town were buying their way out of it by going to college or whatever. By '68 that became a *real* problem, something between 50 and 60% of the troops in Vietnam were black or Puerto Rican, and it became perceived as a minorities' war. It was a money thing more than anything. They were fighting

because they had no other choice. They really had no motivation to do the best they could, and again this led to the fragging incidents and things like My Lai.

There wasn't really a reason for the troops in Vietnam in that time to give the effort required, for the most part, like we saw in World War I or World War II or Korea. It just wasn't the right situation. I don't think it was political, because most of the guys over there could care less politically. It was more of a social thing. It's a hard thing to explain or show, but, you know, you've got to picture the situation — you have a platoon of 70 to 100 guys and 75 are black and 10 are Puerto Rican, and the platoon sergeant is white and the platoon officer is white, and all of these guys knew guys who went to college and didn't go. It was an odd situation, one that caused even more political unrest.

DWIGHT: *When the first issue came out it really took the media by storm. Suddenly, we're seeing Dan Rather and CBS News and other places commenting about a Vietnam comic being produced by Marvel.*

DOUG: Yeah, that was kind of surprising, although, you know, doing a Vietnam comic book was certainly going to get some kind of coverage. Whether it was going to be positive or negative was another thing. I think that what happened was that a lot of the newspapers and TV stations took their cue from THE WASHINGTON POST. THE WASHINGTON POST reviewed the first issue of THE 'NAM as if it was a novel or a history book. Their former Saigon bureau chief was the one who reviewed it, and he liked it, liked the way we'd handled it, and I think that when the various readers for TV companies and newspapers and whatnot saw that review, it kind of led them to look at the comic as press releases from Marvel. I think that's what really stimulated that first burst of newspaper and TV coverage and whatnot. It was the fact (A) we were doing a comic book on the Vietnam War at all, and (B) that somebody out there was actually reading it. That was enough to justify them doing some of it.

DWIGHT: *Were you a little bit afraid or apprehensive about all of this press coverage?*

DOUG: Well, I don't know . . . I got over being nervous about doing interviews and things a long time ago. I used to be one of these people that was extremely shy, had difficulties with that, so I kind of deliberately took debate in high school and college to get away from that problem. The only way the media coverge ever really worried me — and my wife more than me — was that we'd get some sort of reaction from the nut fringe, people that were vehemently anti-Vietnam or vehemently antiwar or even vehemently pro-Vietnam,

"Readers said we were prettying things up

Panels from THE MERC, that Doug wrote for Marvel.

who would take offense, have some sort of backlash, something negative, but that really hasn't happened so it really hasn't been a problem.

DWIGHT: *I was also thinking…like Bruce Springsteen, the classic case of him being featured on the covers of TIME and NEWSWEEK. It was hyped to such an extent that it produced a negative reaction.*

DOUG: Hm. I never really considered that because my feeling was then, and kind of remains, that your average comic-book reader doesn't really read the newspapers or look at most magazines, and it couldn't really hurt us. The people that would see that stuff were people that would not normally be buyers, so it would be like a new kind of audience, one that really had not gotten into comics before.

DWIGHT: *What was the most frequent question asked of you by the, you know, the official media, that is to say people outside of comics?*

DOUG: Well, the obvious question that everybody asked me was if I was a veteran. I hear that from everybody. I get it from comic readers. I get it from all of the newspaper people. Everybody asks me that. The next question is always, you know, why we did a Vietnam comic in the first place. Every single person that I talked to at a TV station or a newspaper asked me that at some point. And then it kind of goes up- or downhill from there depending on who's doing the interview.

DWIGHT: *RAMBO, wasn't he a hot topic?*

DOUG: He was probably a third or a fourth. At first, especially the really early stuff, everybody asked me if we were going to do it like RAMBO, and then we got a couple of issues out that dropped off. Then we got more of an exclamation that we were not doing it like RAMBO. I think the RAMBO thing has kind of passed now, as much because of films like PLATOON and FULL METAL JACKET as for any other reason. I'm curious to see how the third RAMBO film does, simply because the climate has changed a little bit since the second one came out.

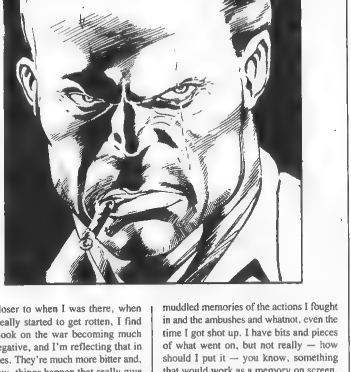
DWIGHT: *Well, one thing that I've noticed in THE 'NAM is that there is no real feeling of guilt or attempt at catharsis. You know, there's no cleansing action going on there. You are sticking to basically an almost diary like format.*

DOUG: I'm trying to as much as possible. People did not have that cathartic reaction while they were in Vietnam, and as the majority of our stories take place in country, if I was going to do cathartic stuff it would be me talking, not the characters, and I try to avoid that where I can. I'm trying to give as honest a view as I can of the way things looked to the people that I'm writing about. I've only really gotten away from that in one or two places. In an upcoming issue, I kind of get into politics of the time for the first time. I'm really kind of worried about that. Issue #15 is two issues after Ed Marks leaves Vietnam and he's back in the States working as a drill instructor at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, waiting for his two year hitch to end, and he writes a note back to the guys in 'Nam telling them what his return home was like. So for the first time I get a peak at what things were like back in the U.S. in 1967, so obviously it's pretty political. I'm curious to see what the reaction will be. I'm a little concerned about it, as well.

DWIGHT: *Was there a temptation to try and, shall we say, pretty up the experience?*

DOUG: Well, I'm sure there are those who would say I am prettying up the experience. We got a slew of letters from people who saw PLATOON when it came out, including one or two that really annoyed me because they were from kids who were taking PLATOON as gospel, and saying that because we weren't showing troops raping women and burning villages and killing children that we were prettying things up. You know, I can only go on the basis of my own experience and what my research has shown things were like. I *don't* want to pretty things up — I think that's a negative thing. One of the things we want to show is just how uncomfortable and unpleasant and nasty war really is, because too many comics and movies and TV shows glorify war and make it look like something everybody should get involved in at some point in their lives. I don't believe that, and even if I did believe it, I think, it would be dishonest to kind of slant a comic book to show it that way, because then what you're essentially doing is you're getting all of these 13- and 14-year-olds to think that war is a great thing and they should

by not showing child-killing and rape."



have the opportunity to do it and so on. I don't know, I just think that's wrong.

DWIGHT: *What was your experience in the Army?*

DOUG: I was in the Army for four years, from January '68 to January '72. I was in Vietnam the first time from late April '68 through Tet and eventually got wounded and sent back to the States in late February of '69. I was in Korea from January '71 until I got out of the Army, and during that period I was sent back to Vietnam on a special assignment and was there from April '71 through August '71. I got sent there both times essentially because I was a radar specialist who was helpful for experiments they were doing with special radars.

The first time I ended up staying there for some time because I was unlucky enough to be an unassigned NCO at a time when they were really short of NCOs, and so I became a platoon sergeant taking squads out into the field, much the way Rob Little does in the current issues of THE 'NAM. For the most part it was an interesting experience, shall we say. *(Laughter.)* I was in a bad place. I was in and around Da Nang/Phu Bai area and it was a pretty hot area, and I saw a relatively large amount of action. So, you know, it was an experience in the true sense of the word.

DWIGHT: *How much of Vietnam have you found yourself psychologically reliving as you've been doing these stories? Have some of the skeletons or the ghosts of the past hit you?*

DOUG: Well, it's actually been happening less as I go along. I have the occasional dream and that's about the extent of the ghosts I see. It happens. It happened more when I first started doing this stuff, back when I was doing the first stuff in SAVAGE TALES and the first couple of issues of THE 'NAM. It's been about a year and a half now so it's . . . a lot of that stuff is gone. It's, I don't know if you want to say exorcised, you know, but the human memory is a tricky thing to start with. The tendency is to remember the good stuff rather than the bad, so I guess the good stuff I still have in the forefront of my memory. I still remember my friends back there and the things that I think of as good times. The bad stuff is pretty well submerged and only comes up occasionally in a dream or, you know, a situation like that.

So the only thing I see happening is two or three issues of THE 'NAM, which includes an inventory issue, are a lot more negative than some of the earlier issues. As I get into this time period, which is much closer to when I was there, when things really started to get rotten, I find my outlook on the war becoming much more negative, and I'm reflecting that in the stories. They're much more bitter and, you know, things happen that really give a pretty good indication of what things were like in that time period. I'm *hoping* that when I get out of '68 and through Tet I'll be able to lighten things up a little, but it really has been a struggle to get through this one time period.

DWIGHT: *There were actually good memories that you had of Vietnam?*

DOUG: Of course. You know, the guys that you work with, your squad, you've heard Vietnam vets call each other brothers, those guys become closer than brothers. You live with them for a solid year, for the most part, live, work, fight, sleep, eat, the whole works, and they're really close to you, so for that year and a certain amount of time thereafter they are like the most important people in the world for you. Most of the acts of heroism that happen in the Army, especially in the Vietnam War, happen more because you don't want to look bad in front of those buddies than for any other reason. The real fear is looking like a coward or an idiot in front of those people, because they are so close to you. I have a lot of good memories about those people. Most of what I consider good memories about my whole time in the Army involve the people I was friendly with and the things we did together and that sort of thing rather than the action stuff.

I have, I guess like most people, rather muddled memories of the actions I fought in and the ambushes and whatnot, even the time I got shot up. I have bits and pieces of what went on, but not really — how should I put it — you know, something that would work as a memory on screen. It just isn't all there, just bits and pieces, whereas I remember whole sections of times we went to Saigon or went on R & R and took a three day pass or whatever. That stuff I remember real well. That's just the way the mind works, I think.

DWIGHT: *Apparently, you've adapted back to civilian life fairly well. After you got out of the Army did you have any problems readjusting?*

DOUG: My problems readjusting weren't so much adjusting to civilian life as adjusting to the way I and other soldiers were perceived.

DWIGHT: *Which was?*

DOUG: Consider that I was not your average returning troop in 1972. I was a college graduate. I read a lot, had kind of a place to escape to during the worst times in 'Nam. That kind of gave me an advantage over some of the other guys who didn't have that and got drunk and went to drugs instead. When I got back, the thing that I had problems adjusting to was the fact that, for the most part, no one seemed to give a shit about the guys who were in Vietnam and the guys who were coming back. There was no effort made to help them get jobs or to do anything at all, essentially. You know, my father was a World War II vet and he got back and his job had been held for him. The guys who came back from 'Nam at the same

"We stood in humongous unemployment lines."

"What they reported on the 6:00 TV news was nothing similar to what I remember things like over there."

time I did just didn't get that. We ended up standing in humongous unemployment lines to get checks, and got sent out on interviews for jobs that had nothing to do with what we knew about. That was tough.

And by the same token, I'd sit by the TV and watch the 6:00 o'clock news, see reporting of the war, and what they were talking about was *nothing* similar to what I remember things like over there. The real adjustment was between what you knew to be true versus what everybody else, who hadn't been there, knew to be true. It's hard to explain the difference. A guy who was in 'Nam and in combat knew some things that — I'm talking about knowing in the visceral sense — was completely different from what some citizen back in the States, who was really concerned and watched the news and read everything that came out about the war. What they knew about the war and what I knew about the war was not the same thing. The adjustment to be made was . . . you just couldn't get into a situation where you were sure you were right and they were wrong or vice versa. You had to come to the conclusion that there was different views on the war that were based on what people saw and heard and read, and you had to accept that and deal with it as it came up. So, for some people the difficulty was dealing with people who called them baby killers and whatnot, you know, and for some people it was the difficulty of trying to explain what the war was like, this is what I did and so on.

My reaction was kind of to forget about the whole thing and go on with my life. I never made a thing about being a Vietnam vet. I never marched in parades, never went to veterans meetings, it just wasn't a thing I wanted to remember or deal with on that level. I just came back and got a job and went back to being a human being, and kind of left it at that for quite awhile, and got rid of some of those memories by writing about them for DC and Pinnacle or whatever. I dealt with it that way. I was luckier than others.

There's a theory that there's two kinds of Vietnam vets; the guys who saw too much action and came back and have that what we used to call the 2,000 yard stare, and don't talk about their time in Vietnam but adjust well in their ensuing life because they just forget about it; then there are the guys who didn't see enough action, who are the ones that have problems because they can't adjust to not getting the rest of

"The public believes everything on TV."

that action that they missed. I don't know if that's a true statement or not. It was an interesting study to make, to see if the guys who go off in the woods and really act strange saw a little bit of action but never got to burn off that adolescent call of glory or whatever it is that makes people do that sort of thing. But it's not really something I want to have to deal with, not something I really want to have to study. But it exists.

Certainly, the problem of having vets adjust even now still exists, and it's probably going to exist until either another war happens or there's a massive change in the outlook of society — and I don't think the massive change is going to happen. The very success of a film like PLATOON indicates that a majority of people still believe things went a certain way, and the majority of vets don't, and that's going to keep things apart for a little bit longer.

DWIGHT: *Of course, right now, there are certain conservation elements in print, field grade officers who claim that the war was actually lost as a result of journalists reporting of too many incidents, that the TV cameras got too close to the war, so to speak.*

DOUG: I don't think that's necessarily the case. You know, it's the old argument about the liberal press and whatnot, and although I have some bad feeling about the way things were covered — certainly some bad feeling about some films and whatnot — I don't think you fix that problem by barring the press as they did in Grenada. That's a "misperception" as well. I'm not sure how you handle the situation. I'm happy to see, you know, the things coming out like the 10,000 Day War and whatnot where we're getting a fairly accurate history of what the war was like, those things are helpful. It's probably just a situation that people are going to have to learn to live with. I mean you can't change the perception of the war by censoring the press. That's what happens in totalitarian countries. That's the very sort of thing that these people, the field grade officers, are supposed to be fighting against.

I have, as I said, some bad feelings about the press, and I agree in certain ways that some of the perception of Vietnam vets is directly attributable to the way the press covered the war. Whether that was because of malice on the part of the press — which I doubt to the point of almost total disbelief — or just the fact that that was just a newsworthy event, which is what I believe. My feeling is that they covered that stuff the way they did because that was the way it was the most sensational, which made it the most newsworthy. The problem is that the majority — I don't want to say majority — a large number of the public believes *everything* they see in the newspapers and on TV as being 100% gospel. They just don't have the imagination or the will to look further to see that what the press is showing is only a small part of the entire story. What happens is the same thing that we see happen in presidential campaigns — they kind of make their decision based on incomplete data, by popularity contests rather than by truth. I don't think there's a way to guard against that except by education, and you can't force education down people's throats. That's just the way the world is, you have to learn to live with that.

DWIGHT: *There also seems to be a tendency of herd instinct with the press. Using My Lai as an example, when word gets out that something like this has happened, then dozens of film crews and everything suddenly are all in this one same spot trying to get a different angle of the same story, while other areas are being completely ignored.*

DOUG: The same thing is happening in the Persian Gulf now. When the Navy was getting that tanker through last week they were literally having to shoo away helicopters carrying the press, who where in such numbers that it would have been *impossible* to have accommodated them all on the ships or even to have let them get close enough to take pictures. It would have been too dangerous if there was a non-press helicopter in the group. I think that the press, being a free press, it's the mentality of beating the other guy or not letting the other guy scoop you, so if anything hot comes up everybody rushes to it because it's hot. Even if it really isn't, you know, it's a matter of if everybody else is going there you've got to go there otherwise you are liable to miss something.

SUDDENLY...
A REBEL ENFORCER!
I CAN'T FIRE AT THE DRIVER...IT MIGHT BE RITA!
RITA...
WHAT DO I SAY TO A SISTER I'VE NEVER KNOWN?
THAT ROBOTIC BITCH COULD RUIN ALL OF OUR PLANS!
IF MY CONTROLS STILL WORK..!
EYIIIAGH!
CAN'T LET LUCANE KNOW HOW MUCH IT HURTS...
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SPECIAL PROMO #6 will be previewed to 18,000 readers in the Comics Buyer's Guide just as it hits the stores!

MICRA #6 features "A New Beginning," which places America's most beautiful robotic warrior in an exciting — and dangerous — new role. It has a stunning full-color cover painting by Ted Boonthanakit, whose interior art is more detailed than ever! Lamar Waldron's full-length story is introduced by an illustrated recap, making this a great place for new readers to start the series.

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"You wouldn't believe high explosive bombs."

I'm sure the same thing happened in World War II. The difference is that in World War II the press was controlled in certain aspects, in terms of what they could see and what they couldn't, or what they were allowed to release. In many cases they were *asked* not to release certain things for tactical reasons and didn't just because they were asked not to, which is fine. I don't know if that would work now. I think if you asked the press not to release certain things for tactical reasons you would get somebody who was trying to scoop somebody else and would release it anyway.

DWIGHT: *Well, and World War II was a declared war, which makes a difference. That isn't the case in the Persian Gulf.*

DOUG: Yeah, that's probably true, and I'm sure the same thing goes for Vietnam and Korea. But, I think, on the whole the press probably did more harm than good in Vietnam, probably did more harm than good in the Persian Gulf, certainly they did more harm than good in the Iranian situation, from the hostage days on. It's this need to get enough material to fill those 90-minute news shows on every night that I think causes a lot of the problems. If they can't get news then they have to make news, and that's not a healthy situation.

DWIGHT: *Was there any sort of resentment in Vietnam over the fact that we had the bomb but we never used it?*

DOUG: I didn't see that so much as a resentment that we didn't invade North Vietnam. When I first got in country in '68 there was a massing of some Marine units on the North Vietnamese border and the word was that **Johnson** had ordered an invasion, which to my mind and from what I've read was the only way to stop the war. About two weeks prior to the planned invasion it was called off, and subsequently **Johnson** withdrew from the presidential election. I think that was really the end of the war right then, because, literally, the only way to stop the fighting was to stop the North Vietnamese from supplying the VC or sending men down. You couldn't do that by stopping the trails because they'd just go around us through Laos and Cambodia, or go in when . . . you know, you just couldn't bomb day and night constantly without doing more damage than it was worth. So really the only way to stop it was to stop it at the point of originality, which was North Vietnam. The fear was that if we invaded North Vietnam we would in turn be attacked by either China or the Soviet Union.

Under the circumstances, I don't think any of the line troops even thought of nuclear weapons. It just wasn't the kind of terrain or situation you would use nuclear weapons, it wouldn't have done any good. We were bombing Hanoi and Haphong and those areas fairly consistently, and if you never saw what we used to call an arc light, which was a B-52 raid, I mean you wouldn't believe just how frightening and efficient high explosive bombs from high altitude B-52s really were. I've never seen a nuclear bomb at close range, but I can't imagine it being a lot worse than a whole load of bombs, high explosive stuff, coming from the B-52s, so I don't think that would have made a difference.

I think it was a question of interdicting their forces, and the only way to do that was to invade. I think if you ask most vets today how they thought the war could have been won, that probably would be the answer they would give in most cases. And again it was not done more for political reasons than for any others. But the whole war was a political war, so you can't really consider that a negative thing. It's just the way things were, again.

DWIGHT: *Let's get back to the comic book.*

Red, White and Blue Windows for "The 'Nam"

THE 'NAM is attracting new comic book readers in droves, and a colorful window display will bring the crowds into your store to buy the comic and trade paperback.

Your display should contain four basic elements:

(1) THE 'NAM posters provided by Marvel, mounted back-to-back on stiff cardboard (as you did for the PUNISHER in-store display in re:**generation** #2).
(2) A United States flag.
(3) A raised platform made of cloth-draped boxes and book stands (or frames) to prop-up comics and books. (These are available at any art supply store.)
(4) THE 'NAM comics and trade paperbacks.

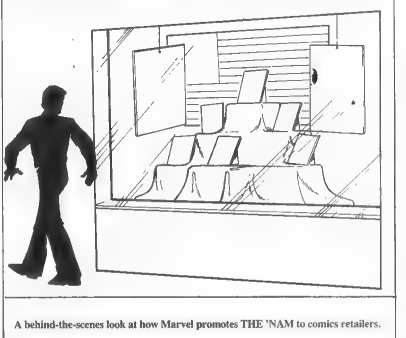
To create your window display, follow three easy steps:

STEP 1: Drape the flag across the back of the window to provide a background.

STEP 2: Tack-up the posters on either side of the flag, or hang them from the window ceiling (if you have the space).

STEP 3: Place the platform in the center, stacking boxes to create several levels and draping a solid-color cloth over them. Put paperbacks on book stands and comics in frames, facing the front of the window.

Be sure to have plenty of copies of THE 'NAM at your front counter, ready for the new customers you pull-in.



A behind-the-scenes look at how Marvel promotes THE 'NAM to comics retailers.

"The whole war was a political war."

DOUG: Okay. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *Is there any amount of disorientation for you in writing THE 'NAM with a company that produces so many superhero comics? Like what's a realistic comic book doing in such a fantasy filled area?*

DOUG: Oh, I don't know, I don't think that's really a problem. The war comic is a genre just as much as the superhero comic, and war comics have been a thing in the comics industry forever. The fact that Marvel hasn't really done a lot of them doesn't mean that it's not a valid way to go. If you look at the old FRONTLINES and compare them to THE 'NAM there's certainly some resemblance in terms of the way we do things and the way they did things. I think there's room for a company like Marvel, which is into a lot of different things, to put out a realistic war comic in the same line that puts out X-MEN or whatever. I don't think it's necessarily a contradiction. They've been doing the GI JOE book for some time, and although GI JOE and THE 'NAM are unlike philosophically, certainly we have some audience members in common. You know, like most comic-book writers and probably most GIs, I grew up reading comic books, and the stuff we read overseas was more superhero stuff than anything else. I don't think I knew a half-dozen guys in 'Nam who would read a war comic in 'Nam, but they'd certainly read THOR or IRON MAN or something like that. So, that doesn't bother me, I don't see it as any sort of problem or contradition or whatever. It's just the way the world is. The superhero comic book is the heart of the industry, so certainly they are going to put them out.

DWIGHT: *Have you read SGT. FURY?*

DOUG: Sure.

DWIGHT: *What are your feelings about that?*

DOUG: Well, I haven't read them in years. I read them when they first came out, I guess. SGT. FURY has more in common with the GI JOE book than it does with THE 'NAM. The basic problem with doing a war book with some continuing character, be it Sgt. Fury or Sgt. Rock or whatever, is that you're stuck with a situation where you just can't do what happens in war and kill off one of the main characters. In World War II there was a fairly high mortality rate amongst people in a given company or platoon, you're just not going to have the same guys go through four or five years of war and come out the other end, it just didn't happen. When I killed off Alberto in THE 'NAM #9, we got probably between 50 and 100 letters from people who started off complaining about us killing off Alberto because they liked the character so much, and then somewhere in the midst of writing the letter realized that by us doing so we proved that we were keeping the comic realistic as possible, and ended up by saying that they really understood why we did it. "I like the character and hated to see him die, *but* I understand why you did it."

You can't do something like that in a book like SGT. FURY because if you were to kill off Sgt. Fury or Dum-Dum Doogan or one of those guys in issue #15 and #16, which is probably about right in terms of the time frame, then the comic is done. You get characters who are effectively invulnerable, even though they are not superheros, and that automatically kind of takes them out of being realistic war comics and takes them into a different subgenre. It makes them *typical* comic war stories rather than *realistic* comic war stories, and I don't think you can do a realistic comic war series with continuing characters. I think the easiest ways out of that are to do (A) an anthology thing where you do different units all of the time and you can do whatever you want, or (B) put

"Guys in 'Nam would read THOR or IRON MAN, not war comics."

"If an M-15 isn't right, vets'll go nutso."

it in "real time" so that you have a changing cast of characters and if you kill somebody off it doesn't really matter because it's a changing cast and he will be replaced at some point anyway.

DWIGHT: *And so the theme becomes dominant rather than the character.*

DOUG: Exactly. It can still be about people, and the advantage is that you can get a lot of different kinds of people in the book in a specific period of time *because* you always have a changing cast. When you're dealing with a set group of characters you're kind of locked into a certain range of personalities and that kind of limits what you can do dramatically. From a writing point of view, I prefer to have the ability to move characters in and out, and have a mix racially and philosophically and good guys/bad guys, the whole works, and the "real time" situation is really good for that. I can really do that in a "real time" comic because I know that if I put a character in and he doesn't get killed, twelve issues later he's going to be gone and I'm going to replace him with somebody else. That really gives me a lot of leeway to deal with.

DWIGHT: *Let's move over to talk about the artists now. When you started out with THE 'NAM you had Mike Golden, who has more of a cartoony style, you know —*

DOUG: M-hm.

DWIGHT: *— not a John Severin realistic style, which is something that I was a little surprised at.*

DOUG: Well, **Golden** was chosen because.. well, he originally did SAVAGE TALES, and the reason for that was **Golden** was a guy who had a special interest in the Vietnam War He had done illustrations for various veterans groups in Florida, and had done Vietnam stuff as a hobby for his own reasons. When we decided to do the SAVAGE TALES stories, hard as it may be to believe, the most difficult thing about doing a story about the Vietnam War is *not* the ability to draw the people but the ability to draw the equipment, the patches and the weapons. Most of the kids don't really care what the weapons look like, but if a vet picks up the book and the M-15 doesn't look right he's gonna go nutso on you, so Mike was picked because he knew as much as Larry or I, probably more, about what the equipment and weapons of the Vietnam War looked like; and by getting those right we added a real note of authenticity to the comic, which kind of dovetailed well with doing the stories as realistically as possible.

The cartoony style of Mike's faces was also kind of a plus because (A) it made it really easy to tell who was who, because all of the characters and distinct personalities, which you can do very easily with a cartoony style as the **Disney** boys always proved, and (B) when we did something really violent and nasty that cartooniness softened the impact of that enough to make it still readable to a 14- or a 15-year-old without grossing them out completely and crying to Mom about napalming a whole village full of people So Mike was an asset in those terms, and in that he required a lot less information in terms of what things looked like than another artist might have.

Mike and I were able to just discuss characters' proclivities, you know, whether a guy cracked his knuckles or chewed gum or whatever, and then Mike knew enough to get the patches and the weapons and the uniforms right and make it look realistic. And from the other point of view, Mike's ability to do characterization so simply, at least for him, made him a really nice person to work with. He's done some brilliant stuff in the book. In the first issue there's a sequence where the platoon on Mark's first patrol is walking through a rice paddy, and that *looks* as realistic as photographs taken of the time period, really good, and he's done that throughout. He's really given us a great sense of reality, despite the fact that people say he does cartoony characters. We get letters — I do the letters pages so I see all of the letters — and we get our share of letters saying they really like Mike's stuff but it's a little cartoony and so on.

Now Mike's leaving the book, my feeling is that he's just a little burnt-out because he's been doing it for a solid year and it's really tough to draw all of those little M-16s and M-60s and all of the patches and whatnot for 120-odd panels a month for a year, and he just wants to get away for a while. As a replacement we've got **Wayne Vansant,** who somebody has talked to, I understand

DWIGHT: *Yeah.*

DOUG: Okay. Well, Wayne is a guy who

Despite his "cartoony" style Mike Golden was picked because of technical authenticity, says **Doug — the top prerequisite of a Vietnam War artist.**

"Officers put black guys on the point because

is new to the business. He had submitted some "Foreign Legion" stuff to Larry for SAVAGE TALES, and from that material it was obvious that he was another guy who knew how to do the equipment and the uniforms and whatnot. When it came time for us to do a filler issue in the first year of THE 'NAM, we wanted something in case Mike missed a deadline, we went to **Vansant** and he did the story about the background of the Vietnam War and Vietcong. He did a real nice job with that, so when Mike decided to quit he was one of the first people we talked to about taking over the book. Wayne's style is not dissimilar to Mike's in some ways. His layouts aren't as polished as Mike's are, but that's a question of experience more than anything else. He does the equipment and the uniforms as well as Mike does, and his stuff is a little more realistic looking. It's not **John Severin** but it's somewhere between **Mike Golden** and **John Severin**, so I think the fans will find that we really haven't lost everything by losing **Michael Golden** — at least that's the way I hope they will look at it.

DWIGHT: *How are you going to be able to deal with the themes of racism and of drug use in a Code Approved comic?*

DOUG: That's a toughy. The racism situation I have begun to deal with, to a certain extent. As I said earlier, we're getting into the time period where racism became a real factor. Starting around issue #13 or so, we have some black characters coming in who will discuss and bring up the situation, and we will deal with it in terms of how it looked at the troop level. You had officers who always put black guys on the point, whether consciously or unconsciously, because they felt that they were more expendable. You'd get platoons that were 65 to 70% black, and yet the black guys would always be the ones pulling the dirty details and the most dangerous positions. That's the level we will deal with it at, as much as we can under the Code. Obviously, we're not going to have people calling each other racial epithets, but we will deal with the problems that existed as much as we can.

The drug question is something else entirely. If you strictly interpret the Code, it's almost impossible to do the drug thing properly. What we're going to have to do — and again I've already started to deal with it to a certain extent — is do it through a parallel situation where we show some guys using drugs, mostly younger guys and both minority and majority characters, you know, and older, more responsible people, who are against the drugs and trying to clean them up, while at the same time these older, more responsible people, are heavy drinkers and right on the edge of being alcoholics.

DWIGHT: *A different form of drug.*

DOUG: Exactly. That was one of the big hypocrisies. You would get a first sergeant who would start drinking at 10:00 in the morning and be telling his 22-year-old platoon sergeant that he had to clean up the drugs out of the barracks because drugs were a terrible habit to get into and were dangerous to the men. Meanwhile this guy would be drunk every night. And, you know, the typical Comics Code thing would be to have everybody who touched drugs dying horrible deaths and things, it would be almost impossible — it certainly would be impossible in a realistic sense — so we're going to have to work it in around the edges and hint at things and do parallels and whatnot. That's really the only way I can see us dealing with the question at all without coming directly face-to-face with the Comics Code problem.

DWIGHT: *Was there any discussion at all about perhaps doing THE 'NAM as a non-Code book?*

DOUG: What I was told right from the start was they they wanted to get it to the largest possible audience and that, therefore, it would be a Code book and would go both direct sales and newsstand, and that I had to just deal with the Code problems accordingly. Maybe Larry could tell you differently, but that's the extent

Two looks at earlier comics' depictions of the glories of battle. Below: Jim Steranko, and opposite: John Severin, whom Doug says current 'NAM artist Wayne Vansant is more close to than Mike Golden.

they felt they were more expendable."

© 1977 John Severin

of my knowledge of it. I was never involved with any discussions of going other ways.

DWIGHT: *Now, of course, Larry is off staff and is consulting editor, and Jim Shooter is no longer editor-in-chief at Marvel — has there been any new suggestions or any change in attitude from the new people you're dealing with editorially?*

DOUG: Well, I still deal with Larry editorially because he's still editing a book on a free-lance basis for Marvel, and **Pat Redding** was his assistant and is now essentially the editor in that slot and is somebody I've dealt with right along anyway, so from my point of view there's been no real changes. The only difference has been that I was recently instructed that I can no longer use the words "damn" or "hell" or "freaking" at all, period. We were using it maybe once an issue just for emphasis and now I've been told we can't do that at all, which is difficult to deal with but not insurmountable. I'm handling it accordingly.

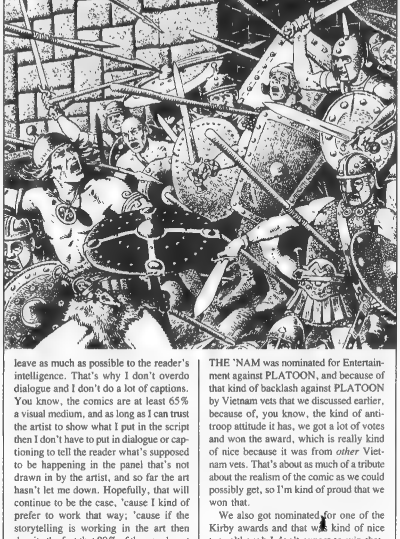
DWIGHT: *Soldiers are noted for their profanity.*

DOUG: Yeah. In real life terms with your average soldier, every third to fourth word is going to be a curse word, and obviously you can't do that in a comic book.

DWIGHT: *We've been talking up a storm. I imagine your voice is ready to collapse. Were there questions that you were never asked that you wished had been asked, for all of your interviews?*

DOUG: I don't know. I've been asked just about everything I could ever think of somebody asking. Pretty much the only thing I've never . . . well, maybe I did, but not really — the only thing that I kind of haven't been asked is why the style of THE 'NAM, which is very laconic and we don't do sound effects for gunshots or explosives or that stuff, has been successful. I think it's just that the readership on the whole is intelligent enough to figure out what's going on if we show a guy with a rifle with a little flame coming out of the front end of it that it's actually shooting without putting a "BUDDABUDDA" or a "TAKKATAKKA," or some kind of a stupid sound effect at the back end of it.

If nothing else, that takes us away from the GI JOE/SGT. FURY/SGT. ROCK kind of look, which involves all of these sound effects. Maybe just by *not* doing that kind of stuff, we get a more realistic attitude out of it, 'cause people look at it and see it's a little different and realize that we're not insulting their intelligence by putting in a stupid sound effect that doesn't sound like the real thing anyway. I try to



leave as much as possible to the reader's intelligence. That's why I don't overdo dialogue and I don't do a lot of captions. You know, the comics are at least 65% a visual medium, and as long as I can trust the artist to show what I put in the script then I don't have to put in dialogue or captioning to tell the reader what's supposed to be happening in the panel that's not drawn in by the artist, and so far the art hasn't let me down. Hopefully, that will continue to be the case, 'cause I kind of prefer to work that way; 'cause if the storytelling is working in the art then despite the fact that 90% of the people out there think comic-book writers just write those cute little word balloons *(laughter)* . . . I think I'm doing my job if the story is there in pictures, without me having to put in captions telling you what's going on.

DWIGHT: *You won an award from a veterans organization.*

DOUG: Yeah, from a group called BRAVO, which just celebrated their 16th anniversary. BRAVO, itself, is a group of veterans organizations, I think there's about 400 of them around the country, and BRAVO acts as a clearing house and an organizational group for parades and whatnot. For the first time, this year they had a big convention in Los Angeles and gave achievement awards to Vietnam vets and THE 'NAM was nominated for Entertainment against PLATOON, and because of that kind of backlash against PLATOON by Vietnam vets that we discussed earlier, because of, you know, the kind of anti-troop attitude it has, we got a lot of votes and won the award, which is really kind of nice because it was from *other* Vietnam vets. That's about as much of a tribute about the realism of the comic as we could possibly get, so I'm kind of proud that we won that.

We also got nominated for one of the Kirby awards and that was kind of nice too, although I don't expect to win that, being as DARK KNIGHT's in the same category. *(Laughter.)* But, you know, it proves there's somebody out there reading us, that's always nice to see. And, you know, just to be nominated when there's 400 or 500 comics on the market and they only have five nominations, that's really an honor and I'm really happy about it from that point of view.

DWIGHT: *Is there any final comment that you would like to make?*

DOUG: Only that, you know, as I've said from the start, I've been really surprised by the success of the book. I'm really happy with it, and I hope that I can continue to maintain the quality and freshness of the stories, so that we continue to be pleasing enough to keep selling the way we are.

"I've studied military history since I was

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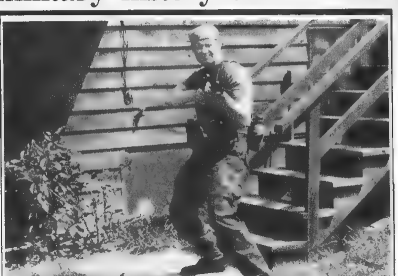

WAYNE VANSANT

Many artists seem content to let the writers do most of the talking. Not so with Wayne Vansant, who succeeded Michael Golden as penciller on THE 'NAM. Wayne has some incisive comments to make about life, war and comics, and he's none-too-shy about making them. This interview took place before a live audience at Shelton Drum's Heroes Con in Charlotte, NC...

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT: *What are your qualifications, Wayne? Why were you the one chosen to draw THE 'NAM?*

WAYNE VANSANT: Well, my interest has always been history — I have probably not bought more than five or ten superhero comics in my whole life — I was interested in regular people experiences as compared to the Marvel Universe and so on. I think there's enough good stories in everyday...not everyday experiences, but *extraordinary* circumstances with ordinary people, let's put it that way. As a consequence, I've always been interested in military history — history in general, but primarily military history — and over the years that is something I've always drawn.

Several times I had sent, oh, military drawings to a comic-book publisher, and I would usually send it to DC because they had SGT. ROCK and GI COMBAT and all of that. Although they weren't what you would call realistic books, they were as close as there was in comic books at that time. Sometimes, I would get a nice letter back. Sometimes, I would get nothing. *Most* of the time I would get nothing. Several times, I came to New York trying to get work, and the thing was, "Quit drawing the war stuff." But I just couldn't get into drawing guys in leotards. I had never seen in my *life* people in leotards. *(Laughter.)* But I know my *father's* generation and the generation of all of the guys I grew up with were all into World War II films — *all* of them. I don't think I went to school with a guy whose father wasn't in the Army or the Navy or the Marines or whatever in World War II, and I grew up hearing their stories. And when I was a kid, war comics were kind of big. They weren't any more realistic then than when I first started into comics, but I read a lot of those and I listened to what people said and I was interested.

How many here know who **James Jones** was? *(Mixed response.)* FROM HERE TO ETERNITY. THE THIN RED LINE. A good writer, he's been dead now for a number of years. He told the story of the war participant who was very much an individual trapped in the system, a person who had absolutely no *control* over

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young, and talked to hundreds of vets."

his own life — a common and ordinary person who was swept up in extraordinary events. I was very impressed with his work and I did a series of about, oh, 15 or 20 drawings from THE THIN RED LINE — which, to me, is probably one of the best works of fiction of all time — and I sent them to him. I didn't know it at the time, but he was on his deathbed. He was dying of congestive heart failure *and* at the same time trying to finish his last book. He wrote me a long, detailed letter about the drawings I'd sent him. And the drawings that I sent him *weren't* that much different than you see in THE 'NAM. They were line drawings of just individual scenes from the novel. A lot of the things he said about expression and the way that people carried themselves and the tension lines in combat and that sort of thing, I still remember

DAK: *That's a great answer for why you're doing THE 'NAM. But if you didn't read current comics, did you just happen to send stuff in at the right time? How did you land the assignment as an unknown?*

WAYNE: Well, I didn't say I *didn't* read comics. I did read a lot of comics over the years. I haven't bought that many over the last 15 years, but I'd always kind of keep an eye on what was on the stands. When SAVAGE TALES came out, I sent some story ideas and drawings in to **Larry Hama** and forgot about it. About a month later I got this *scrawled* note that said, "I only work with people that I can talk to on the phone during the daytime hours." That's all he said. At that time I was working for the Hyde Museum in Atlanta as the director of security, so I got on their Watts line and called him up and he was not only interested in my artwork but also in my writing. It so happened that our interests were kind of along the same lines. He likes ordinary people, too. I mean, he writes GI JOE, but he was kind of interested in the same sort of thing — the realistic stories. The first time I talked with him he told me about THE 'NAM, and he said he *might* be needing a fill-in artist. And . . Larry's not one to give you a lot of compliments. *(Laughter.)* You have to work pretty hard with him. He used to give me hell. "This stuff looks like crap. What have you been doing down there?" That kind of thing. And it wasn't until I got really working with him . . . Well, I need to back up. SAVAGE TALES I did four stories for; two of them were published — and for a while there was a period of inactivity. But they did need me for one issue of THE 'NAM because **Mike Golden** was always behind I had finished penciling it and had sent it to the letterer and I'd just got it back when **Pat Redding**, the assistant editor, called me. It sounded like she was about to cry — this was last December and I was getting ready to take a week's vacation the first of January — and she said, "How soon can you get this book to us?" I said, "Well, when do you need it?" She said, "How about a week and a half?" It was right in the middle of Christmas and I didn't have any idea how I would do it, but I did it. And I *think* that's another reason why I'm doing the book — because they like people who are dependable.

DAK: *Yeah, comics never change that way. From the largest publisher to the smallest everything is always needed usually about a week before they even call you on the phone. Also, I want to say that this interview is real informal and, as we're talking, if anybody wants to ask a question don't feel like you're interrupting, just stick your hand up and consider yourself part of the conversation. Now I've got a tough question: A lot of people really disdain war comics, so-called war comics, and feel that GI JOE and THE 'NAM are sort of whipping people into a frenzy to go to war. How do you address those types of comments?*

WAYNE: Well, I don't read GI JOE. I tried to read it and had kind of a hard time with it. Maybe it's too complex for me. *(Laughter.)* But . . I understand Eclipse is

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This panel from G.I. COMBAT illustrates the difference in the way comics used to portray the fantasy of war, from 'NAM.

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"People *do* get an adrenaline rush."

Bottom: G.I. JOE cover. Top: Wayne's depiction of an adrenaline rush.

coming out with a comic called REAL WAR STORIES, and it's going to be a pretty strong antiwar thing. I think THE 'NAM, in a way, is an anti-war comic — but if you think about it, any good war story is going to be an anti-war story, anyhow. Have any of you all ever seen what you consider a pro-war movie?

AUDIENCE: *THE FIGHTING 64TH with Jimmy Stewart.*

WAYNE: Yeah, oh yeah; but those are old. I was talking about in recent memory.

AUDIENCE: *RAMBO.*

WAYNE: Well, even RAMBO —

AUDIENCE: *RAMBO: FIRST BLOOD II*

WAYNE: Yeah, okay.

AUDIENCE: *No, I take that back. There are elements in it that can be interpreted as anti-war.*

WAYNE: They are subject to interpretation. But the film I was thinking of was TOP GUN, which I absolutely despise. I remember watching it and thinking it wasn't about war, but unfortunately it was about war. They had the incident of the Russian planes over the Indian Ocean *just* for the chance for the guy to show what he learned and kill a couple of Russians.

AUDIENCE: *What else can you do with Russians? (Laughter.)*

WAYNE: Well.

AUDIENCE: *I tend to agree with you that most war movies or stories, just by virtue of the hero having to kill or be killed, are anti-war.*

WAYNE: This is more in the movies — but for a while there, when the Vietnam War was still going on, you had the stereotype of the lifer career man who was bloodthirsty and then you had the wimpish hero who was the good guy and didn't even know how to kill, and I think both sides are very biased. There was a review recently of FULL METAL JACKET that said that it was more realistic than PLATOON because it did not give you the adrenaline rush that PLATOON did, which it said was unrealistic because of that, which I disagree with. I have been studying military history since I was *very* young. I have talked to literally hundreds and hundreds of veterans. I can talk with a veteran and learn more from him in a half-hour than his wife would learn in a lifetime, because I *know* how to talk to him. And the disagreement that I had with that review, very briefly, is most often war *does* give an adrenaline rush and there are people that get into it. And unless you experience it, you can't know what it's like.

I was in the Navy and I never experienced it, *but* I have talked with enough people to know something of what combat is like. My best friend's first experience of combat — he says that when it was all over, he felt so elated. He said that actually if he had thought about it, what he was doing, he would have died, but it was just such chaos that he didn't know what was going on, didn't know when it started, didn't know when it was over. he was feeling that adrenaline rush. And that's something you have to address, too. Everybody's going to react differently to war — you can't make it look as terrible

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"You fight or you're going to die."

Mike Golden's cartooniness kept 'NAM from being depressive — but was almost too clean, says Wayne.

as it is to everybody, because it's not terrible to everybody. Some people get into it, and that's something you have to address.

AUDIENCE: *The dark side of our nature.*

WAYNE: And I think you get a little bit of that in THE 'NAM. There was one issue, I think it might have been Ed Marks' first experience of killing somebody; they pass an ambush and a couple of people get cut down and he knocks out the nest with a grenade and then just gets right on top of it and starts shooting. There's a panel of his face and you don't know if it's fear or surprise or what it is, but there's just something about his eyes in that scene. People *do* get an adrenaline rush. That has to be addressed. There is also a camaraderie that develops between individuals in combat. I don't think it's important to make it antiwar or pro-war as it is to make it real, and that's true with anything.

DAK: *During World War II most of the men who went to war were volunteers — and as you pointed out, that was almost* all *of them. They didn't have to be drafted or forced into it. They may not have wanted to go to war, but they felt that it was worth doing. You can simplify it and say you're pro-war or anti-war, but the real question is — is the war worth fighting? Yes, war is hell, but sometimes the alternatives are worse.*

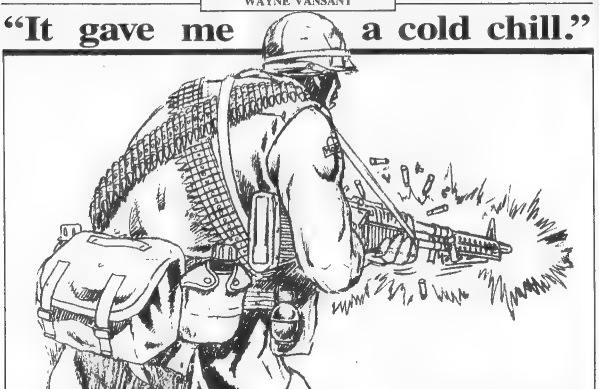
WAYNE: And there's something else, too. My best friend was in the First Cav in Vietnam, and I used to work with a guy who had been with the Second Infantry Division in World War II, and, you know, hey, 30 years apart with their experiences. But I remember talking with these guys on two different occasions, separately, talking about their personal experiences with them, and they both said the exact same phrase — it just blew me away — and the phrase was: "You don't care if the sun don't rise." These two guys never met but they had more in common, probably, than other people in their own generations. Ask a person who has gone to war why they fought. During the Vietnam War, I heard people who were against the war — which really everybody should be against war — they'd say, "They can draft me but they can't make me fight." Well, as my best friend says, if they put you over there, you're going to fight or you're going to die. Once you're in that situation it doesn't make any difference about your ideology, you fight or you die. That's it. Most people the reason they fight is just to survive.

AUDIENCE: *When you write, do you try to make sure that whatever you're doing will not turn into either pro-war or anti-war?*

WAYNE: Well, let me make this clear, I won't be writing THE 'NAM. **Doug Murray**, who spent two tours over there and also has a history major and is a very good researcher, he will be writing THE 'NAM. I would *like* to write more, but I plan to stay on with THE 'NAM for awhile, I'll tell you. I am real happy to be on this comic. But then again, you can affect a lot of things by the way it's drawn too. **Mike Golden** is wonderful, there's no doubt about that; the only complaint I had with him — and often the cartooniness of it was good, I think that kind of kept it from being depressive — but for awhile there everything was almost too clean. I think it's beginning to lose some of that. I think **John Beatty**'s inking has changed a little bit and it's beginning to look more gritty. But my primary focus would be making it look realistic, making the people look natural in the situation, to give them that dreariness and sometimes that tension that goes along with war.

AUDIENCE: *Are you going to be inking THE 'NAM?*

"It gave me a cold chill."



WAYNE: No, **John Beatty's** still going to be inking. At this point in time I don't see how anybody would have time both to pencil and ink THE 'NAM. I would *love* to ink my work, but I do what I can.

AUDIENCE: *Will there be more involvement in the book with the Vietnamese people themselves?*

WAYNE: I'm sure there will be. You know, the character in the issue that I did, #7, Dong I believe his name was, he will be coming back He's a former VC that came over to the South. And since the comic is going to deal with the war all the way up to 1975, and since the American involvement, as far as ground troops, ended in 1973, it will *have* to deal with more Vietnamese. There's not going to be that many Americans left, except for advisors and support groups and correspondents, so it will have to deal with more Vietnamese.

AUDIENCE: *Will you deal with the enemy and their side and all?*

WAYNE: Well, issue #7 did. It dealt exclusively with the VC and the Vietminh, which was the forerunner of the Vietcong. And I'm sure we'll probably deal with that again. It will just about have to.

AUDIENCE: *How closely will you be working with Doug Murray, and will you be changing the style of the book in any way at all?*

WAYNE: Well, I want to work closely with him. I met **Doug Murray** when I went up there in April, and he encouraged me to make any kind of changes that, you know, I needed to make. He is a real nice fellow and is real flexible. I did make one change that **Larry Hama** jumped all over me about, but I won't be making too many changes. But as far as the way the characters look and all of that, he's left it up to me, except for the characters that have already been established by **Mike Golden.**

AUDIENCE: *When you start with #14, like, what do you see in the characters like Ed Marks and so on that might be different from how Michael Golden saw them?*

WAYNE: Well, as each month passes for the comic, a month passes in time, so characters rotate home. Ed Marks is rotating home the issue before I take over, but there will be other characters coming and going. There already are some new characters I'm working on now in the story that will start out as kind of minor characters and work up to being main characters in the story. And then they will rotate home, or whatever happens to them. I don't know yet

AUDIENCE: *In THE 'NAM when some of the characters get wounded or killed or whatever it's like, you know, Ron Virgo got killed and it was like, I don't know, it kind of gets to you. How do you feel about that, about the readers getting so involved with the characters that when they get killed it has a kind of a personal impact on them?*

WAYNE: You know, that's something that kind of affected me too. I never understood people's involvement with soap operas until I started reading this comic. There was something about the character Ron Virgo, I thought that guy was going to be killed. I was on the phone with **Larry Hama** and he happened to mention, he said that **Ed Marks** was going to rotate home in a few months, right after Ron Virgo gets killed. He said that and I thought, "God, he *is* going to get killed." It just gave me a cold chill. So I can understand how people can get involved in, you know, works of fiction, where, you know, the people kind of become real to them.

DAK: *Since Doug is going to keep writing THE 'NAM, given the degree of your interest in this stuff and your involvement, do you have story conferences or do you pretty much get it handed down to you — and does Doug have the comic mapped out very far into the future?*

WAYNE: At this point I don't know; he has certain elements of it mapped out and

"Anybody know who Lt. Calley is?"

I'm sure he has a long-range plan of certain major events and how he wants to handle them. When I was up there in April one thing that they were kind of worried about and didn't know how to handle was the drug issue. At that time they were thinking that we might just have to ignore it. Because it's a newsstand comic under the Code they were going to have a hard time doing the drug issue. *But* in the one I'm working on right now, #16, it starts with people smoking grass, and we kind of lightly tiptoe around it.

DAK: *That really brings up a problem, 'cause if the comic is going to be real, how can you ignore such a big part of what went on?*

WAYNE: Well, there are already things, like in the first issue they ran into the language problem. I mean if it was like a graphic novel then you could say just about what you wanted to. The big joke was the term they used for new replacements, they called them greenies I think, which is not the real term. They did that mainly because of the Comics Code. But that's not what they called them, so they have to make changes like that. I'm curious about how they're going to deal with things like... they are already dealing with racial problems and stuff like that in Vietnam, and they're doing it real well. I don't think that's in any of the issues that are out yet, but some of the issues that are in production deal with that.

But I'm curious about how they're going to deal with things like **Lt. Calley**. Anybody know who **Lt. Calley** is? *(Mixed response.)* He's the guy that, you know, his platoon wiped out a couple of hundred supposedly peaceful villagers — nobody really knows — the My Lai Massacre is what they call it. I'm sure eventually they will deal with that. That was the division that **Doug Murray** was in. So that's something we'll have to deal with. They haven't really dealt yet with, like, the Americans' dislike for the South Vietnamese, which was very strong. I'm sure that's something we'll deal with too.

AUDIENCE: *I don't really understand the problem about the drug issue. If you deal with it realistically it's not something that can be positively displayed, so why would there be any objection to references towards drug abuse in a negative sense?*

WAYNE: Well, a lot of people in Vietnam smoked grass and there was no real effect, they never got into trouble, it never got them killed, and they did it all of the time. Everybody did it — that's just about the statement Doug made to me about it. Most troops did not smoke grass in the field. They might have smoked it in their bases or something like that, but very few smoked it out in the bush. I mean that's *dumb*. Those that did were just really dumb.

AUDIENCE: *Got offed.*

WAYNE: That's right, yeah. But the enemy smoked. Have you ever heard a

Above: Wayne's pencils for THE 'NAM #17. Below: Joe Kubert and Robert Kanigher's splash from a 1971 SGT. ROCK story based on Lt. Calley and the My Lai incident. 'NAM writer Doug Murray was in Lt. Calley's division.

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"An M-16 emits bone-shattering sound waves."

Mike Golden 'NAM art.

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AUDIENCE: *As one commentator pointed out, you could spot an American Army base from a satellite photograph and you could walk through the middle of a Vietcong base and never be aware that you were in it.*

WAYNE: That's true. The U.S. Army has always had a criticism for this all the way back to World War II — the British were very critical — of our emphasis on superior firepower. Army doctrine is still the same: If you put out more bullets than they do then surely you are going to win. It didn't work in Vietnam.

AUDIENCE: *The Germans criticized the Americans for the same thing. They pointed out that we had more bullets and that by spending so many bullets it became cheaper for us to be uncaring about our war machine. For the Germans and the Japanese, they could afford to lose men faster than they could lose planes —*

WAYNE: Or were willing to, anyway.

AUDIENCE: *Right. While we can turn out an airplane in three days and it takes almost 16 years to turn out a soldier.*

WAYNE: That sounds terrible but it's so true.

AUDIENCE: *You mentioned Eclipse's REAL WAR COMICS, would you be planning to contribute to that?*

WAYNE: Yeah, I would, if Marvel will let me. I'd have to talk to them first. I've sent some stuff to Eclipse. Once I get rolling on THE 'NAM I'll have a little time to do some additional work, and it will give me some opportunities to write. I want to do THE 'NAM but I have other stuff that I'd like to do as well. See, up until a month ago I worked like 50 hours a week and did this too. Now I'm just doing this, and I'm the kind of person that just doesn't like being idle. I'll find something to do. I've always been interested in the Foreign Legion and I'd like to do something about them. You know, there's never been an Algerian War comic book, I'd like to do that.

AUDIENCE: *I happen to know there was one in French.*

WAYNE: Oh, really?

AUDIENCE: *Yeah. It was put out by the Algerian communist underground.*

WAYNE: Oh, a propaganda type of thing.

AUDIENCE: *Yeah. The communists are very big on comic books.*

WAYNE: How about that.

DAK: *But have you ever noticed they don't have any good artists?* (Laughter.) *I have to give credit to Ed Hannigan for this — he designs a lot of DC's covers, and Marvel's — and that used to be one of the things he talked about, how in New York the various socialists and communists will put up posters and they don't seem to have any good artists.*

AUDIENCE: *What were the circumstances of your coming to do THE 'NAM? Did you just send in some drawings at the right time, or did they contact you?*

WAYNE: I did work for SAVAGE TALES before THE 'NAM. That's how I got THE 'NAM, through SAVAGE TALES.

AUDIENCE: *Michael Golden, was he quitting or —*

WAYNE: Yeah. He just lost interest. That's how I ended up taking over. I was very persistent. After SAVAGE TALES quit I really didn't have anything to do. So I would call **Larry Hama** to see if there was anything for me, and I figured I could say, "Hello, how's it going, do you have any work for me?" and he would say no and I would say, "Well, thanks, I'll talk to you later." But I decided every time I talked to him I was going to get him talking about something else. And Larry loves to talk, let me tell you. *(Laughter.)* We always had some common interest. We talked about everything. And I would send him ideas for comic books. I had one idea for a French Foreign Legion character, and he really got so interested in him he started calling him by name. When he started that, I *knew* I had him hooked a little bit. And then one time he said, "Well, how would you like to do a regular comic about the military?" And I said, "Sure, that'd be great." So I kind of started working on story ideas and all of that.

Well, about that time — I had already done THE 'NAM #7 — and about that

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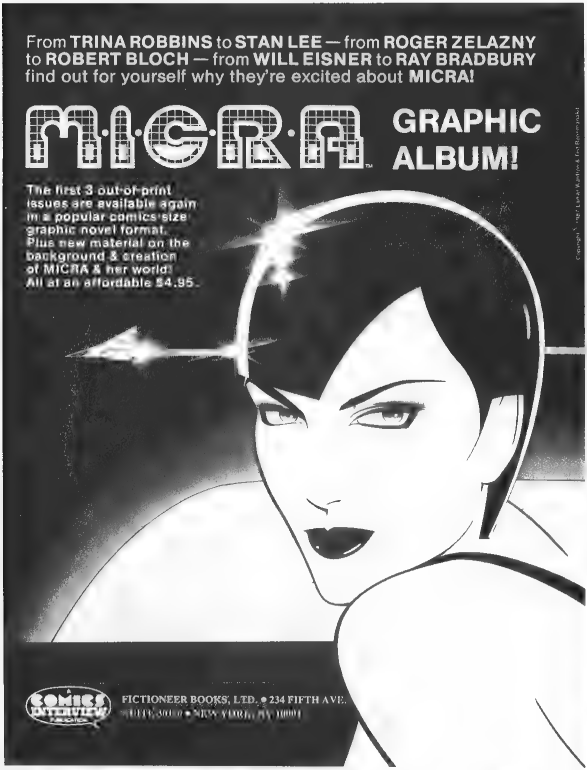
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"Marvel feels funny about you working for DC."

time. . .I can't really remember exactly how this came about. I think that was kind of when **Mike Golden** was kind of losing interest. Larry asked me if I would like to pencil about three issues of THE 'NAM while **Mike Golden** was doing another project. And, as I said earlier, Larry kind of keeps you in the dark. And I said, "Well, I ought to come up there sometime." He said, "Well, listen, let me know when you want to come and we'll send you a ticket and set you up in a hotel." And I said, "You all will pay for it?" I didn't know they did things like that. So I went up there and **Pat Redding**, the assistant editor, told me that it was only a matter of *time* before **Mike Golden** dropped out, because he didn't stay on a project for very long before he just lost interest in it. And still Larry didn't say anything. And then **Doug Murray** said, "Well, I was under the impression that you were going to take it over." And *still* I didn't get anything from Larry. Just nothing. And I'm still working my job at the museum, and one day I decided I just didn't have time to do both, and I called up **Pat Redding** and I said I was quitting, giving the museum my month notice, and she called Larry and then called me back and said, "Well, you got it. You're the artist on THE 'NAM." I guess he was just waiting on me to make my move.

AUDIENCE: *How long does it take you to do a whole issue of THE 'NAM?*

WAYNE: I could probably do it easily in three weeks if I get the script on time and there was no other interruptions — easily, three weeks — but there's always something going on.

AUDIENCE: *Do you prefer to work with a detailed page-by-page panel-by-panel broken down script, or do you prefer the more generalized plot form?*

WAYNE: On THE 'NAM I think I like working with the fully broken down script. But I haven't been in comics very long so I don't have a whole lot of opinions on that.

AUDIENCE: *You did two stories for SAVAGE TALES that you said weren't published, I was wondering about that.*

WAYNE: Well, one was kind of a mistake. The first one I did was never published. Larry made the mistake of assigning the same story to two different people. They're real organized sometimes. But I sent in a list of little synopses of stories and one was about the Battle of Cameroon, and he said to do Cameroon. And it just so happened he'd told some other artist to do it too, and we were both halfway through it before he realized this and so he just went ahead and let us finish them and paid us for them. They kind of *throw* money around sometimes, I think. And the other one was about the Italian campaign. I mentioned earlier that I had a novel that I spent a year or so on, about the Americans in Italy during World War II. I took a little scene out of that novel for this story. I had finished, I had written the story and I had pencilled it, but SAVAGE TALES went out of business.

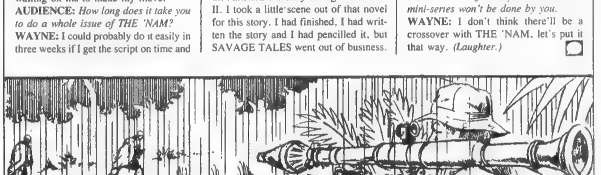
DAK: *Well, it looks like people are drifting in for another panel, any last questions out there?*

AUDIENCE: *Would you ever be interested in doing another book, like SGT FURY or SGT. ROCK?*

WAYNE: You know, I think I always liked SGT. ROCK because that was just all there was. To me it could be done realistically. There have been *some* elements in the story over the years that have been pretty good, but I think you'd just about have to scrap the whole thing and start all over again before I'd really be interested in doing it. It's just too farfetched. I don't know why they *dreamed up* all of that weird stuff when just plain realism is *so much* more interesting. Even SGT. FURY — I mean SGT. FURY is a real dream Warfare is not that way. It's just like if everybody in this room was placed in those circumstances — it would be like what if *you* were there how would you feel. Would you be interested in being one of the combat-happy Joes of Easy Co., or would you be interested in saving your ass? What would *you* do? Doing SGT. ROCK — not really. Not unless they came up with something a lot better. And I understand that Marvel has funny feelings about you working for Marvel and DC.

DAK: *So it's safe to say the SGT. FURY mini-series won't be done by you.*

WAYNE: I don't think there'll be a crossover with THE 'NAM, let's put it that way. *(Laughter.)*



"I am far more skeptical of our nation's

BILL SIENKIEWICZ

Like a lot of folks whom Joyce Brabner and Lou Ann Merkle recruited for REAL WAR STORIES, Bill Sienkiewicz found himself staggered by some truths about war. As a top-ranking artist, Bill was able to channel that shock into the creation of a potent piece of cover art for the book. Here's what he has to add to that artistic statement.

MARK BORAX: *How did you get involved with REAL WAR STORIES?*

BILL SIENKIEWICZ: Joyce Brabner called me up. We had, sort of, made connections on the convention circuit, and I think we were supposed to do a co-signing at Jack's Comic Kingdom here in San Diego a couple of years ago, but through one thing or another, that didn't happen. I think Marvel didn't want **Harvey Pekar** sighted with me. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *Really?*

BILL: Yeah, or something along those lines.

MARK: *I'm curious, which one of you would it have made look bad?*

BILL: Exactly. *(Laughter.)* But Harvey and Joyce called me up because they wanted to let me know they were not snubbing me or anything, which I thought was an *incredibly* polite thing to do, and totally unnecessary. So, we just started talking.

MARK: *This was about two years ago?*

BILL: Yeah.

MARK: *Did Joyce pitch the REAL WAR project then?*

BILL: Not at that time, but a little bit later. They came to ask me if I'd do the cover, because she'd asked several people about having a cover done and everybody, I guess, had mentioned my name. She even went so far as to mention that if there was anything that I was afraid of, like in terms of reprisals or whatever, we should talk things through. Because, you know, doing a book on conscientious objection is...

MARK: *It's not a popular stand?*

BILL: Right, exactly. You know, I think their first choice for a cover was **Joe Kubert**, but Joe for one reason or another bowed out. And, so I decided I wanted to talk to my father, because he did serve in the Second World War, in demolition. I thought, when it came down to it, I really would just do it of my own volition, you know. So I worked up the cover, some sketches based on the references and books she had sent me.

MARK: *Whose idea was it to do the cover in that particular kid style of art?*

BILL: That was mine. When I got all of the references, I worked up several drawings of, like, death camps, and some pretty well-rendered shots of soldiers, you know, standing with dead people underneath their boots as a trophy, almost. They're really show-offs, you know. They're really into posing, that's a real heroic thing to do.

MARK: *And you had some photos of them where they were puffed up.*

BILL: Yeah, doing that stuff. But that, sort of, would have been like any other cover. So what happened was I was looking through this book of children's drawings, FIRE IN THE SKY, and it just *hit me!* I felt like I was more or less a transmitter, you know, like the kids did the work and I just made it accessible.

MARK: *You did something like that once in MOON KNIGHT, didn't you, with that kid style of drawing?*

BILL: Yeah. It's something that I find is really... I don't know if it's art therapy, or what, but I find that the most primitive style is often the most powerful.

MARK: *Expressive?*

BILL: Yeah. When I did "Hit It!" — I mean, out of all the MOON KNIGHT stories, I can say that that was the one that was most mine. There are ways of handling abuse, and one way is creatively. It's like a primal scream. Another way is to go around with violence. It's all sort of the same creature. So the drawings, the kid's stuff, is really powerful. I use it as a conduit.

MARK: *Also with the kid style, in "Hit It!" or on the cover, you could have depicted the same stuff graphically, but in a certain way it abstracts it and makes it more primal. I think you feel an immediate reaction when you look at it.*

BILL: Right. You know, on the cover where it said, *"Asi murieron nuestros padres,"* — "This is how they killed my father," — it's those kinds of things in FIRE IN THE SKY, just *constantly* guys in green with machetes, blood everywhere, and these bizarre helicopters that the kids would draw! So taking a composite from several different drawings, and a little bit of artistic license, the cover came together. I wanted the real faces to be in the background, plus the death's-head. I would have liked to have done it completely without them, but I think it *needed* a little something to balance it out.

MARK: *Without the real faces and the death's-head?*

involvement in these areas now."

BILL: I would have liked to just push it completely, but I think that it helped to tie it in a little bit.

MARK: *Sometimes, when you put in a bit of reality, it makes the unrealness seem even more unreal.*

BILL: The impact of that for me it was that decapitation.

MARK: *What did you learn from working on the project?*

BILL: My views changed. I was pretty ignorant of what was going on. I am far more skeptical of our nation's involvement in these areas, especially now that we know all about the secret team and everything with the CIA. You know, it's got a real Mars Attack Cards kind of feel to it — what are they screwing around next?

MARK: *How old are you?*

BILL: I'm 29

MARK: *So you were too young for the draft during the Vietnam War?*

BILL: Right. I can remember being in English class, it was like 15 minutes to noon, I was a freshman, and they announced that the war was over. I never really had to experience the draft, although people that I know are now experiencing that, at least the registration. I was sort of in between. I don't know, I suppose that may have bred not a real burning desire for awareness, for cognizance of what's going on.

MARK: *Your ass wasn't on the line.*

BILL: And when my father would talk about things, that was a completely different war. He never *really* talked about it, it was like he did it and that was it.

MARK: *You know, that's interesting, my father was a bombardier in the Air Force, World War II. I saw this special on TV about Air Force guys, and for a lot of that generation their strongest reality was those war years and a lot of them lock it away inside and it's in them, they're living it, and when they talk about it it's like it's still happening. And my father never talks about it.*

BILL: My father never did, either. I think that's a common thing, that a lot of people who have gone through that *refuse* to talk about it. It's almost like it's a separate person that's still living in them.

MARK: *It sort of bonded them in a fusion that they don't know quite how to deal with, to a certain extent. Joyce said she made every contributor aware of the possible repercussions of taking this stand — have there been any repercussions from taking this stand?*

BILL: No.

MARK: *What kind of feedback have you gotten, in general?*

BILL: The book is getting a lot of mixed responses. A lot of people are expecting to see, you know, joys of combat. And I've heard people who think that the centerspread inside — where the troop distribution is — is the most impressing thing they've ever seen in a comic book. It's like it just sort of cements it. Other people think that **Steve Leialoha's** story . . . it's like it's not preaching to the converted, it's got a little bit of a lighter tone, and it's not so grim and serious, and it's not full of the self-righteousness that some people assume is there. So, admittedly, we're getting mixed responses, but it's like anything else, we'll give it another run. Not another true war stories, but something else that's True Something — which I think will be the CIA

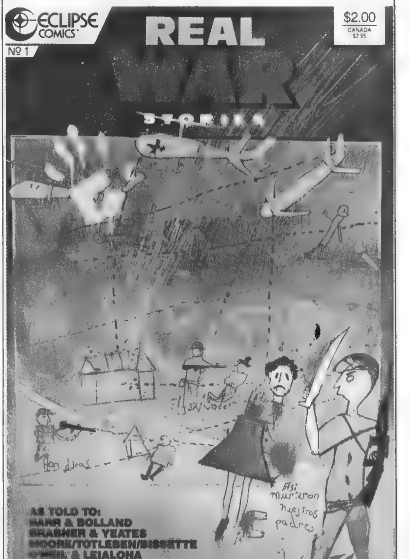
MARK: *Are you going to participate in that?*

BILL: I'm planning to, yeah.

MARK: *Great. Any closing statement?*

BILL: Buy it. Be aware of it.

Bill says "The 'Mano Blanco' or 'white hand' is the mark of right wing death squads." He adds "The impact for me — is that decapitation."



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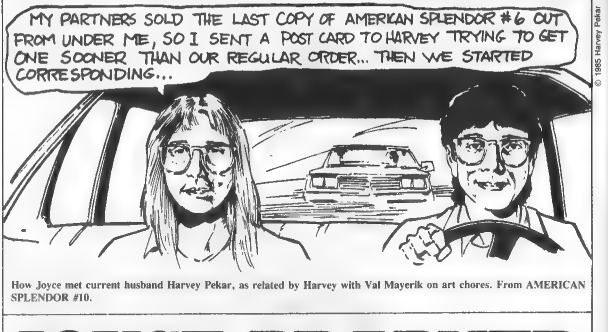
"If I can make AMERICAN SPLENDOR a household


MY PARTNERS SOLD THE LAST COPY OF AMERICAN SPLENDOR #6 OUT FROM UNDER ME, SO I SENT A POST CARD TO HARVEY TRYING TO GET ONE SOONER THAN OUR REGULAR ORDER... THEN WE STARTED CORRESPONDING...
© 1985 Harvey Pekar

How Joyce met current husband Harvey Pekar, as related by Harvey with Val Mayerik on art chores. From AMERICAN SPLENDOR #10.

JOYCE BRABNER

REAL WAR STORIES marks the first time Joyce Brabner stepped out from inside a comic book in order to edit one. Joyce is famous as a character in her husband Harvey's unique AMERICAN SPLENDOR. (When I caught her she was distributing fliers that began: "HELP KEEP HARVEY PEKAR'S MARRIAGE FROM BECOMING A HELL ON EARTH — PROMOTE HIS THIRD WIFE'S FIRST COMIC!!")

Why did Alan Moore, Denny O'Niel, Bill Sienkiewicz, Steve Bissette and all the other seasoned pro's agree to work for a tenderfoot editor's risky project? I think Tom Yeates put it best: "I was raised on American heroes who fought injustice, and I am compelled to do the same."

MARK: *What's this "Help keep Harvey Pekar's marriage from becoming a hell on earth!" thing about?*

JOYCE BRABNER: I'm trading on my husband's name because I have *no* publicity budget whatsoever. *(Laughter.)* Dammit, if I can make AMERICAN SPLENDOR a household word, then I had better be able to do it for a book that I work on! This is my first comic book, so I'm just exploiting the connection. REAL WAR STORIES is unlike any other comic book that's ever been out: It's a collection of very true, real stories about U.S. military experience from Vietnam through Grenada up to and including Central America. We have five stories, five different points of view

MARK: *How did this book originate?*

JOYCE: It was conceived by CCCO — the Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors — which is a national military and draft counselling organization that has been around since the late '40s. What they do is put young adults in touch with vets and people from countries like El Salvador. They do a lot of this in the classroom. They were concerned that they weren't reaching enough kids. You cannot be in every school, you cannot be in every church, and the kids don't really want to read pamphlets or brochures. **Lou Ann Merkle,** a program director there, came up with the idea of doing a comic. She knew about AMERICAN SPLENDOR and came to visit us in Cleveland, asking for advice on printing something inexpensively. At that time the budget we used for AMERICAN SPLENDOR, which was really working cheap, was too expensive for them; but since I've been an activist for 18 years, my strong point is raising money and getting diverse people to work together. I'd been working in prisons before I married Harvey, and I had comics connections and friends, so I offered to take it on as a project and turn it into a color comic book using mainstream people. I said, "Ride with me and we'll have a comic book that *will sell* in the comics stores across the country." You know, there's about 4,000 comic-book specialty stores that you can look up across the country, and 97% of the customers are young men aged 16 to 25, so this was just the kind of focus we needed.

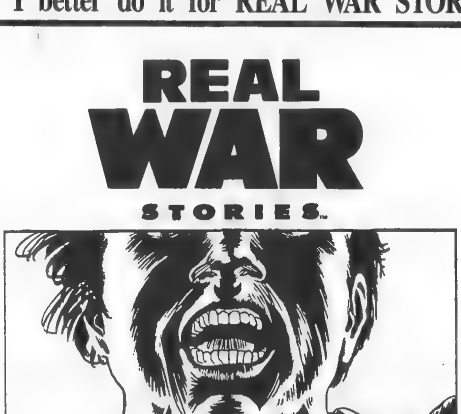
MARK: *That's a great idea.*

JOYCE: Well, it's a lot better than passing it out to second generation Unitarians and Quakers and sons and daughters of hippies

MARK: *So, you helped them reach masses of kids in order to tell them what war is really all about?*

JOYCE: Well, to give them another point of view. When we started working on this we had **Tom Cruise** in TOP GUN. When TOP GUN came out, applications for enlistment in the military academies went up like 10% overnight. RAMBO was hot. This was before PLATOON, before FULL METAL JACKET. What the book is about is not to *tell* people what to do with their lives, or what to do, it's to tell kids: Okay, here's somebody telling you one story, here's another story — you had better get this straight in your head *now*, before it involves you. You'd better start asking questions. Ask your dad, ask your

word, I better do it for REAL WAR STORIES!"



brothers, ask your friends — you keep asking, you keep finding out.

MARK: *Don't get manipulated by the herd mentality?*

JOYCE: Also, don't get manipulated by us. Don't take my word for it, but if the book raises questions, then go and find out for yourself.

MARK: *Lou Ann came to you and you had the idea of making it a comic?*

JOYCE: She had the idea of doing a comic book. I had the idea of making it a commercial, mainstream color, comic book. I said I would help her do whatever it took to do it, and I ended up being the editor and recruiting all of the artists.

MARK: *Where did you get the stories?*

JOYCE: CCCO helped by finding the people who had the stories, because people come to them all of the time as volunteers or to talk to vets, or they know somebody who knows somebody. Lou Ann put the word out, she found some stories and I found some, and then we just discussed it. When I found **Steve Leialoha**, I also found out that he was a conscientious objector, so his story is incorporated in the book. I also found this woman in Boston. One of the things I decided was the book *had* to include a woman's perspective — not only that, but that the story had to be done by a woman writer, which turned out to be me, and a woman artist, which is **Rebecca Huntington.** This is her first published work. Lou Ann found **Bill Ehrhart,** who is a vet who is now a teacher. **Alan Moore** did **Bill Ehrhart's** story. Alan worked not only from interviewing Bill over the phone — because Alan was working from England — but also from some of Bill's own writings.

MARK: *Did the story go to Bill to be checked?*

JOYCE: Bill looked at it with Lou Ann and me, and that way . . .

MARK: *You edited it?*

JOYCE: Well, there's very little editing

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For the very first time ever, Fred & Bianca are at a loss for words, when they come face-to-face with The Censor.

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—Marvelous Marvin
(The Master Thief)

Remember, Kids: When it comes to censorship — just say "NO!"

X-THIEVES™

by Henry Vogel & Mark Propst

#6

COMICS INTERVIEW PUBLICATION
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"Kubert disassociated himself from the project."

I WAS THE ONLY WOMAN AMONG 800 MEN. WHEN THEY WANTED TO EMBARASS SOMEONE, IT WAS ME THEY WOULD CALL UP IN FRONT OF THE FORMATION. WHEN IT WAS TIME TO START LEARNING TO THROW GRENADES, I WAS TERRIFIED. I TOLD MY DRILL INSTRUCTOR...
MY AIM ISN'T REAL GOOD-I MIGHT MESS UP AND HURT SOMEONE...
IF YOU WANT TO SLEEP WITH ME, THERE'S NO PROBLEM...
I'LL PASS YOU...
HE GAVE ME HIS PHONE NUMBER...
I WAS A GOOD IRISH CATHOLIC GIRL...

© 1987 Brabner & Huntington

with Alan. With Alan it's just reading your way *through* it. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *So you helped to recruit the talent at that point.*

JOYCE: Recruiting the talent and . . . a lot of people in comics are like everybody else, they're *not* necessarily very knowledgeable about the political issues. Military organizing wasn't what I knew best; what I knew best at that point was prison work, that's what I'd done for nine years. It was real important to give them the information they needed. See, they knew how to do this stuff —

MARK: *CCCO knew how to do it?*

JOYCE: No, the comic-book people. They know how to make hackneyed characters and garbagie plots interesting, so it was just a question of giving them the raw material. And we set down a number of guidelines when we conceived the project. One of them was really taking a leaf from AMERICAN SPLENDOR, in that all of the stories were to be true, and they were to be told exactly as they were told to us. They were not to be composite characters. We could not manipulate any events. There are maybe four or five sentences in the entire book that are not traced directly either to verbatim dialogue or something somebody wrote, and some of that is because they did not have action mini-cams when the conquistadors were running around in 1550, we had to guess what they were saying.

But the rules were no composite characters, no fictionalization, and we tell the stories exactly the way they were told to us. We saw ourselves as being amplifiers. The comic book is very much as though I took you and put Nancy or Filipe in a room and said, "Tell him what you told me." **Tim Merrill,** who works with black vets, just told his story exactly the way it's down in the book. What I did was get together **Mike Barr** and **Brian Bolland** and **Denny O'Neil,** and Lou Ann — and **Joe Kubert** was interested in the project, but chose not to work with this one —

MARK: *What did Joe Kubert have to do with it?*

JOYCE: **Joe Kubert** was interested in doing the project originally, but he chose to disassociate himself from it later on down the line

MARK: *Any particular reason?*

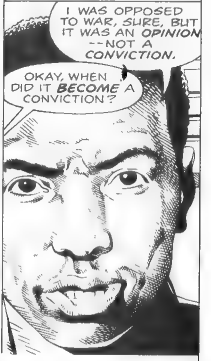
JOYCE: That you would have to talk to him about, but I understood his reasons and I am very glad to have spent time talking to him about the project.

MARK: *It's interesting to think of Joe Kubert being interested in an anti-war project — a lot of people might look at him as sort of glorifying war for a lot of years.*

JOYCE: Well, I approached him because I really wanted to *exploit* the connection. I knew what his personal stands were, I knew what his career had been, and I told him I wanted to exploit the connection. One thing that I made very, very clear to the people who were to work on the project was what the fallout from working on a book like this could be

MARK: *Not being able to get any further comics work for some reason?*

JOYCE: Well . . . I will say that we had



© 1987 Barr, Bolland & Farmer

"Harvey wrote one of the stories that I

Some of the artistic contributor's statements on why they pitched in to REAL WAR.

Mike W. Barr *(Writer)*:

" I contributed to *Real War Stories* for three reasons:

"1. My father died a few months before I was born of an injury suffered while a member of the armed forces.

"2. While in college, I received crucial draft counseling from The American Friends Service Committee; this is my way of paying them back.

"3. I had never written a comic book script based on an actual personal history, and considered it an interesting technical exercise.

"Please note that I see every movie Clint Eastwood makes and like them."

Steve Bissette *(Artist)*

"For our children, and their children's children, that they may embrace life rather than senseless death; creation instead of destruction."

Brian Bolland *(Artist)*

"I have had no experience of military life which would provoke me to make an anti-military statement. Why then, you may ask, do I, an Englishman, have the gall to stick my nose into a book about the American military? An honest answer would put ideology second to professional considerations. I enjoy working with Mike Barr (and he can talk me into anything); I've been meaning for a while to get some of my work inked by Mark Farmer; but also I consider the function of the true artist in society to be as an irritant, to slightly upset the comfortable popular notion of the way things are. This book will irritate certain people, and for that reason I'm glad to be in it."

Mark Farmer *(Artist)*

"After surviving over 7 years under Margaret Thatcher's dictatorship (including that cleverly stage-managed, vote-winning little affair in the Falklands) I thought few things could still upset me. However, working on this project has reminded me of the disturbing way people still readily dedicate the *one* life they have to obeying the orders of others in subservitude, all aimed at killing other people... voluntary slavery for legalized murder... pathetic! Let's hope people have a broader view of things after reading *Real War Stories*.

"(If I was to be totally honest I also see this as one-in-the-eye for the Careers Officers at school who 'suggested' I consider the Police or Armed Forces whenever I mentioned commercial art as a means of making a living.)"

Rebecca Huntington *(Artist)*

"I wanted to work in comics that don't sell out. It's hard to make money without compromising your principles. I've been lucky so far, but I've also been hungry a lot. Most of the jobs I've worked are non-traditional for women, so I know something about what it's like for women in the military, having to work many times harder just to prove that you can lift, run machinery, do the job.

"I won a lot of marksman(!) awards as a junior member of the NRA, but when I grew up I realized that the games we were playing were based on a romantic myth of macho heroism."

Mark Johnson (Marco Polo) *(Artist)*:

"During the 8 years I lived in Guatemala, I loved and admired these almost extinct Mayan people who had mastered the art of living. I am contributing to this book because the people of Central America are being tortured, murdered and starved so that we can consume coffee, bananas, beef, etc. at cheap prices."

Steve Leialoha *(Artist/Writer)*.

"(Yes, that's Hawaiian). There were already 50,000 dead and half a million would die by the time I got drafted. It was obvious the military didn't have a clue about what to do short of occupying the whole country or bombing them back to the Stone Age. And I couldn't ignore the racial hatred clouding the issue, especially with my being related to all the ethnic groups in the Pacific Ocean. Doing alternative service as a conscientious objector allowed me to do something 'in the best interests of our country' and has prompted me to do this for you."

Paul Mavrides *(Artist/Back Cover)*

"When I was 15 (in 1967) a bunch of us closed down the Akron, Ohio draftboard to protest the war and the draft—we were nearly all 15, 16, 17 years old. They locked the doors because we were trying to get inside to occupy the building. Rather than risk the embarrassment of arresting kids who weren't even draft age, they shut down until we left, two days later. And I'm still not sorry."

Alan Moore *(Writer)*:

"...Because I have a deep aversion to all forms of violence and war, and if I have to explain, I must fall back on the pacifist slogan that says 'A bayonet is an instrument with a worker on either end of it.'"

Nancy O'Connor *(Colorist)*:

"It feels good to be part of a book that works to balance the current epidemic of war-glorifying propaganda fantasies such as *Rambo* and *Top Gun*."

Denny O'Neil *(Writer)*:

"I've written a lot of comic book stories—something over 700. The one included here is a kind of atonement for some others I'm not proud of."

Sam Parsons *(Colorist)*:

"My father was a conscientious objector during World War II. This book is important because something is needed to combat the powerful military ad campaigns. They are using the same psychology to sell us the military that they use to sell us deodorants, jeeps and blue jeans; and the ads work."

Leonard Rifas *(Artist/Writer)*

"I was 18 in 1969. I remember how confusing it was to wrestle with the big questions about war, violence, God, patriotism, moral obligation and Viet Nam."

John Totleben *(Artist)*

"I prefer to let this story speak for itself."

Tom Yeates *(Artist)*.

"Whenever one American is kidnapped by 'terrorists' sponsored by Libya, Iran or maybe the USSR, our politicians display great, theatrical outrage. Well, throughout much of this decade the US sponsored military of Guatemala and El Salvador averaged about 100 kidnappings a month, and their victims often end up tortured to death horribly. Nicaragua doesn't have this problem, for they threw out their corrupt military, who we now call 'contras,' and send millions to. Nicaragua *is* a democracy, damn it! The floods of refugees coming into the US from Central America are not running from the Sandanistas in Nicaragua, but the US backed countries of Guatemala and El Salvador. US policy in Central America is inhumane, racist and unjust. I was raised on American heroes who fought injustice, and I am compelled to do the same."

ended up rejecting." "Your husband!"

© 1987 Bissette, Yeates & Johnson

this book accepted by two other publishers who later got cold feet on it.

MARK: *Why?*

JOYCE: Well, the first publisher . . . I'm there saying, "Here's the book, I'm paying for it, distribute the damn thing so it doesn't end up under my bed with all of the AMERICAN SPLENDORs." *(Laughter.)* I'm saying, "Here's the book, I'm bringing you **Alan Moore** and **Brian Bolland** and **Mike Barr** and **Denny O'Neil,** all of this stuff." This particular company was doing a lot of stuff with toys, so I said, "I know you say you want it, go talk to your toy distributors about the *kind* of book this is going to be, because I don't want the rug pulled out from me later." In about three days that was it, it was over.

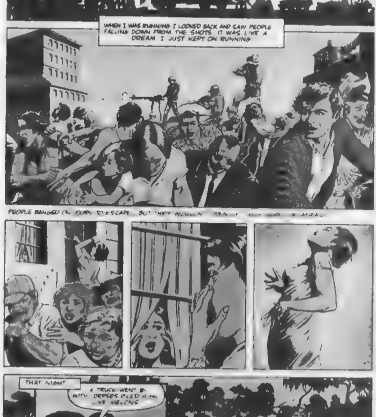
MARK: *The toy people wouldn't go near it?*

JOYCE: Well, their company wouldn't go near it, they thought it was too risky. A second publisher said this was great, then said they had some editorial problems. They said that **Alan Moore**'s and **Mike Barr**'s scripts weren't really professional enough, or something like that.

MARK: *They didn't think that Alan Moore's and Mike Barr's scripts were up to professional standards?*

JOYCE: That was the reason they gave — I don't think that was the complete reason. I think it's something else, okay. This started with our talking about why somebody might choose to bow out. It's real risky to stick your neck out and take a political stand, especially if you haven't been doing this for a long time and you're not knowledgeable. There's always somebody out there ready to chop you or outsmart you or say you're being used as a tool for this group or that group or whatever. So, the big thing that I stressed when I recruited artists and writers was making absolutely sure that they made *informed* decisions about participating in the project.

They needed to know, for example, that the Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors is a legally organized non-profit organization, which gives them the same status as something like a shelter for battered women; but like working for a shelter for battered women, there are people who will say that a shelter for battered women destroys families because it encourages women to leave, and it goes against God's plan for children and mothers, and that kind of stuff. There's always going to be that kind of thing. Now, my husband, because AMERICAN SPLENDOR still doesn't make big bucks, depends on his job at the VA hospital, a government hospital, and *we* certainly talked about whether there would be consequences in working on this book, and what we would do.


WHEN I WAS RUNNING I LOOKED BACK AND SAW PEOPLE FALLING DOWN FROM THE SHOTS. IT WAS LIKE A DREAM. I JUST KEPT ON RUNNING.
PEOPLE RANGED IN FROM SIDE ESCAPE
THAT NIGHT
TRUCK-RENT'D WITH PROPANE TANKS IN BACK. NO WELDING

While Tom Yeates was storyboarding this scene, a man stopped by to fill his propane tanks. The man turned out to be a refugee from the very same massacre.

MARK: *Harvey didn't have anything to do with the book, did he?*

JOYCE: Harvey wrote one of the stories that I ended up rejecting.

MARK: *(Laughter.) You rejected your husband!* .

JOYCE: He wrote a very good script about Central America, but it was AMERICAN SPENDOR style. In order to orient myself to working in mainstream comics, I had to sit down and read lots and lots and lots of what was popular — I read lots and lots of X-MEN — to get a sense for what could be followed and what couldn't, and it turned out that I ended up writing the story in his place. It's also probably not real good for me to be editing Harvey, or vice versa.

MARK: *Too subjective?*

JOYCE: It has to do with who does the dishes and how they get done. (Laughter.)

MARK: *So, back to the possible ramifications.*

JOYCE: I gave potential contributors a list of questions that I wanted them to think about before signing on. I wanted them to talk to people in their families, especially anybody who had been in the military,

"G.E., which *owns* NBC, allegedly let

WHILE FINANCIAL AID DRIES UP, ROTC GETS BIGGER
THEY'RE DRAFTING US ALREADY—THE ECONOMIC DRAFT.
THEY DID THAT TO NURSES IN THE 70s. THEY WOULD GO IN AND PROMISE TO PAY OFF ALL THEIR SCHOOL LOANS AND SAID THEY WOULDN'T SEND THEM TO VIET NAM. THEY GOT SENT...
DECEMBER, 1989: A 20 YEAR OLD WOMAN ARMY BRAT WAS KILLED IN THE HONDURAS. THEY DON'T TELL YOU THAT ON THE NEWS.
WHEN WE WATCHED THE BODY COUNTS DURING VIET NAM, THEY NEVER MENTIONED WOMEN. THE NETWORKS DIDN'T THINK THE AMERICAN PUBLIC COULD HANDLE THE IDEA WOMEN WERE SUPPOSED TO BE PROTECTED.
I WOULD HAVE THOUGHT AS A TEENAGER WHO LIVED THROUGH THE VIET NAM WAR, YOU WOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER...
YOU ARE ALL LIVING THROUGH A CENTRAL AMERICAN WAR— WHAT DO YOU KNOW?
I GOT INVITED TO THE PHIL DONAHUE SHOW WHEN THEY SET UP A SATELLITE TO TALK TO WOMEN IN LENINGRAD. WE DISAGREED ON EVERYTHING. THE SOVIET WOMEN WANTED TO KNOW WHAT IN HELL FOR WERE THE AMERICAN WOMEN WANTED TO KNOW IF THEY WERE BEING MONITORED.
I GOT UP THE NERVE TO ASK THEM HOW DO THEY FEEL ABOUT HAVING THEIR SONS & HUSBANDS IN AFGHANISTAN
IT WAS THE USUAL "WELL, IT'S NECESSARY..." AND I SAID, "I DON'T CARE IF IT'S NECESSARY, HOW DO YOU FEEL?"
WE CONCLUDED THAT WAR IS SOMETHING MADE AND PERPETUATED BY MEN
NONE OF US HAVE ANY INTEREST IN WAGING A WAR.
IT'S AN ARCHAIC WAY OF SETTLING DIFFERENCES AND ALL IT DOES IS KILL THE CHILDREN THAT HE SO THROUGH HELL TO GIVE BIRTH TO
THEY EDITED THAT PART OF THE SHOW OUT
END
1989 Barr, Bolland & Farmer

and I wanted them to talk to their employers about the project, and *that* turned out to be important. Some of these people were working for large companies that had a few things to say about them doing this, even if they were working for free on their own time. In some cases, there was a little bit of discomfort. **Paul Mavrides** was a hellraiser from jump; in fact, he talks in the comic book about, when he was 15, helping to shut down the Akron draft board — he knew the job was dangerous from the start.

Other people were just wading into this. I wanted to make sure that they had a real good sense of the book, of the project, what was going on, what my intentions were. It's not easy to take an unpopular stand, and I know this from working long long years on stuff like this. And the other thing is — this is part of why I indicated that we would have everybody make a personal statement on the inside cover of the book, because not all of us agree on every issue — some of us are anti-interventionists, some of us are outright pacifists, and *none* of us work for CCCO. I didn't work for CCCO, I did this for free.

MARK: *What was the common bond?*

bum nuclear reactors loose in Ohio."

JOYCE: A lot of the common bond, I think — besides the fact that I got to them and wore 'em down *(laughter)* — is that people got very charged up about it. They knew this was going to be important. It was a chance to work in a very different way. There were some very different personal reasons which came out through working on this. **Mike Barr** talks in the book about his father, for example. Mike also talks about the creative *challenge* of working with nonfiction, somebody telling you a story face-to-face and then putting that into a story form. **Bill Sienkiewicz** sounded interested, and then when he began to realize what it was, it got *real* interesting to him.

I think for most of the people working in the mainstream it was just very refreshing to be told "hands off, go all the way with the idea." A real good example is **Tom Yeates**'s TIME SPIRITS stories, where he's got him running around in Guatemala, and he's *trying* — just like Harvey did the other night on LATE NIGHT — to cram in something of political content, make some sort of comment; but he's still working with people who travel in time, he's got **Jimi Hendrix** running around the jungle and all of this stuff. Also, a lot of the censorship stuff was going on, so this was also the idea of being able to work "hands off" — although I don't believe that when you look at the comic... there are some scenes that are raw in terms of what we are showing, but there's nothing really tasteless or extreme. We don't even have any "fucks." It wasn't necessary, we didn't need to do that; we were all able to write without putting "motherfucker" or something like that in it.

MARK: *What Harvey was doing on LATE NIGHT, what's the connection with that and the anti-war book?*

JOYCE: Well, Harvey was being interviewed by **Letterman** and it was lightweight banter, and he had decided he wanted to talk about G.E., which *owns* NBC, and the fact that the NBC News has yet to carry the story that's all over the papers, in Ohio at least, about the fact that there was a report released that shows that G.E. knowingly let bum nuclear reactors loose in Ohio. Their own engineer said not to do it, and they said they'd figure it out later, kind of cut a deal with the NRC.

MARK: *So General Electric owns NBC and —?*

JOYCE: And NBC has not reported anything negative about this company, which is one of the biggest defense contractors around.

MARK: *Harvey was talking about this on the air with Letterman?*

JOYCE: Yeah, on NBC, wearing an "NBC On Strike" T-shirt. Harvey figured, you know... he's not real interested in being a celebrity on talk shows — or *having* a talk show, that's another thing that came up, the fact that he's turned the network down on an offer to have his own show. But he is interested in shaking people up about what the hell's going on. He kind of refers to it as putting the fox in the hen house to take care of the chickens, 'cause you've got G.E. taking care of the news.

MARK: *What was the connection to REAL WAR STORIES?*

JOYCE: It's the connection in trying to make a topical issue part of what your doing. In REAL WAR STORIES we were able to turn very loose. You're very very free when you're working within the context of "tell the truth, tell the story the way it was told."

MARK: *So Eclipse finally picked up the book.*

JOYCE: They've been terrific, and as a result we are going to be doing two other books with them. It's my intention to very

very slowly do books of this sort for different non-profit organizations.

MARK: *So Eclipse liked it enough to make you the offer to go ahead and do some more similar projects?*

JOYCE: I bring the projects to Eclipse. What happened was Lou Ann took Xerox

Above: Mike Barr, at the CCCO office during the time he was writing the story of Tim Merrill, below. For more of Tim's story, see the following pages.

"...BUT WE WERE CARRYING NUCLEAR WEAPONS -- AND AS SONAR TECHNICIAN, I'D GIVE THE MISSILE ROOM THE TARGET COORDINATES.
"THAT'S WHEN IT HIT ME -- OUR SUB COULD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR STARTING WORLD WAR III.

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JOYCE BRABNER

"The Christic Institute got a $1.4 million set-

copies of REAL WAR STORIES to a demonstration in May, and people with the Christic Institute saw it and asked how much it would cost to do a comic book of this sort, to popularize the story that they have of the secret team and the La Penca bombing. This was terrific. This is an organization that's really shaking things down.

MARK: *The Christic Institute, what is that?*

JOYCE: They're an interfaith public law office, and the chief legal counsel, **Danny Sheehan,** was one of the guys who defended THE NEW YORK TIMES in the Pentagon Papers case. He also defended United Artists when LAST TANGO IN PARIS was called obscene in Idaho, and he's defended some people from the American Indian Movement. Where they began to make a name for themselves was when they went out and got a $1.4 million settlement for **Karen Silkwood's** family. I have to say, putting this into perspective, they got $1.4 million for **Karen Silkwood's** family; this is an organization where everybody gets paid the same rate, they were all making $9,000 a year from the top lawyer down to the janitor — I think they've gone up to $15,000 by now — and this is one of the reasons why I respect and admire them so much. After Christic did the **Karen Silkwood** case, they went after the Greensboro police department and the Greensboro Ku Klux Klan —

MARK: *North Carolina?*

JOYCE: In North Carolina, when the civil rights activists down there were murdered. Even though nobody was ever found guilty of the murders, they got a large settlement for the family. They also did the first —

MARK: *Who paid the settlement if nobody was ever found guilty?*

JOYCE: The police department and the Klan, was my understanding — you'll have to double-check with them — for negligence, I believe. Then anyway, they did the first Sanctuary case, and while they were doing the first Sanctuary case, they started hearing all of these really crazy stories about drugs and ammo going up and down Central America. So, my next book will be about their investigation and how they found out about this secret team, which resulted in a federal lawsuit against **Shackley, Secord,** and all of these other guys, alleging 25 years of murder, gun-running, drugs, the whole bit, all around the world, not just Central America. The Christic Institute is pressing this lawsuit, for a newsman who was a victim in the La Penca bombing at a news conference

"...BUT I STARTED PAYING FOR IT AS SOON AS I HIT BASIC TRAINING. THEY DO EVERYTHING THEY CAN TO INTIMIDATE YOU, LET YOU KNOW WHO'S THE BOSS."
"GIVE ME AN EXAMPLE, TIM."
"SURE. THE RECRUITER GIVES YOU A LIST OF THINGS TO BRING TO CAMP -- PERSONAL ITEMS, SCRAPBOOK STUFF LIKE THAT. BUT AS SOON AS YOU GET THERE, THEY TAKE IT AWAY FROM YOU!..."
"...YOUR ONLY LINK WITH HOME, AND IT'S GONE."
"AND I GUESS I DON'T NEED TO TELL YOU ABOUT THE HAIRCUTS AND THE UNIFORMS. THEY'RE DESIGNED TO MAKE YOU PART OF A UNIT, NOT AN INDIVIDUAL."
"I DIDN'T LIKE GIVING UP MY INDIVIDUALITY, BUT I MANAGED TO PUT UP WITH IT, FOR A LONG TIME. I PUT UP WITH A LOT."
"I SHOULD HAVE REALIZED WHAT WAS HAPPENING WHEN I SAW THE CLASSIFICATION OFFICER ASSIGNED ON FOR ELECTRONICS, AS I SAID..."
AND THE JOBS I WAS OFFERED WERE KITCHEN STEWARD, MESS MANAGEMENT SPECIALIST AND OTHER MENIAL JOBS
"I TOLD THEM I DIDN'T JOIN THE NAVY TO BE A COOK. I USED TO HIRE COOKS. HE TOLD ME TO HANG ON FOR A SECOND..."
"...THEN HE SAID HE'D FOUND AN OPENING FOR A SONAR TECHNICIAN IN THE SUBMARINE SERVICE. HE SAID THERE WERE NO MORE OPENINGS FOR S.T.S IN THE SURFACE FLEET."
"I FOUND OUT LATER THIS WAS AN OUT-RIGHT LIE, BUT AT THE TIME, IT DIDN'T SEEM SO BAD. I HAD JOINED THE NAVY FOR ADVENTURE, AFTER ALL..."
594
"THAT WAS ONE OF THE FIRST OF A LOT OF CASUAL COMPROMISES I MADE. THEY DIDN'T SEEM SO BAD AT FIRST EITHER."

A high school guidance counsellor who turned down REAL WAR STORIES, said he had a private practice client who burst into tears reading this story, because the same thing had happened to him.

in Costa Rica a couple of years ago, where among other things they found out that CIA and ex-CIA people had recruited this guy to bomb this conference, and the next hit this guy was supposed to do was the U.S. ambassador to Costa Rica, to make it look like the Sandanistas did it.

MARK: *And one of the people who was a victim in the bombing has pressed for this lawsuit?*

JOYCE: He was a journalist. He was badly wounded and all of his equipment was destroyed; that's his means of making a living. Under the RICO laws, if you get your form of livelihood interfered with by something like kidnapping or murder or like that, not only can you bring charges about that specific incident — in this case the bombing — but anything that's related. It's got very, very broad powers. So, here's this very courageous law office smart enough to say, "Okay, since the cops aren't going to find out who killed all of these people, we can file a civil suit

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tlement for Karen Silkwood's family."

* SO WHEN IT CAME TIME FOR MY P.R.P. INTERVIEW - MY PERSONALITY RELIABILITY PROFILE -- THEY ASKED ME IF I WOULD DRAW MY GUN ON A FELLOW SAILOR WHO TRESPASSED IN THE NUCLEAR WEAPONS AREA
* BY THAT TIME, MY OPINIONS HAD BECOME CONVICTIONS -- I SAID NO.
YOU SAID "NO" -- EVEN THOUGH YOU KNEW THAT GUARDING THE NUKES WAS PART OF YOUR DUTY?
NOBODY EVER TOLD ME I'D HAVE TO GUARD NU-CLEAR WEAPONS--
--JUST LIKE THEY NEVER TELLS THE SEAMAN WAS PART OF THE WEAPONS DIVISION. I WASN'T TOLD THAT UNTIL I WAS IN THE NAVY TOO DEEP TO GET OUT.
I THINK THEY PURPOSELY WITH-HELD THAT FROM US AT THE RECRUITING STAGE.
"I THOUGHT I'D FAILED THE P.R.P. INTERVIEW FOR SURE, BUT I PASSED -- THEY PROBABLY THOUGHT I'D 'COME AROUND' LATER.
OR
"THERE WAS NEVER ANY CHANCE OF THAT, BUT WHAT HAPPENED NEXT GUARANTEED IT.
"I WAS ON GUARD ONE NIGHT AND SAW A YOUNG SAILOR LYING ON THE FLOOR SOBBING. HE'D BEEN VIOLATED.
"...'GREASED'. THEY CALL IT. IT'S COMMON ON NAVY VESSELS. SOME GUYS GRAB ONE OF THE SMALLER RECRUITS, SHOVE A GREASE GUN UP HIS -- UP HIS RECTUM -- AND GO
AND THAT'S COMMON?
SURE. THE SMALL MAN -- THE GUY WHO CAN'T OR WON'T FIT IN -- FALLS PREY TO THE LARGER MAN. OFFICIALLY IT DOESN'T HAPPEN, OF COURSE. BUT IT DOES.
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against them." This is the Christic Institute, they've been digging this stuff up It's a pretty exciting story. That's the next comic book I'm working on. There will also be a sequel to REAL WAR STORIES.

MARK: *What does it feel like to be working in the mainstream and trying to say some not-popular things?*

JOYCE: Well, I have absolutely no commercial stake in the mainstream, it's not something that I work in.

MARK: *For money?*

JOYCE: No, I'm not working for money. I was a dealer at one time, I co-owned two stores. I'm not threatened personally, but it happens to be the way a lot of friends of mine make their living. I think that it says a lot for the medium that such very important news stories — especially this Christic one — are becoming a valid way to use comics. I think what I'm doing is comics as journalism. And, I also think that a lot of people in comics, you know, are bright, are compassionate, are idealistic, but the way that they're working right now affords them no outlet. What I would like to do, and what I would see myself as doing over the next couple of years, is working with causes, nonprofit organizations that I respect who have needs, whether it's information dissemination or fund-raising or other needs, to partner them with creative people, artists and writers, to create books that get the word out and in turn afford comic-book writers and artists this chance to work with the sort of freedom that underground comics have had, but with all of the advantages the mainstream has. There have been plenty of other books that have touched on these issues and more, coming out of the underground, but it's always sort of hampered by this "poor and dirty" image; you know, good art, really good writing, good color, good reproduction, that's what's different about this book.

MARK: *What about changes that it's preaching or propaganda?*

JOYCE: I don't think that we're necessarily preaching, because I'm not really talking about propaganda. See, I want to hold the line with making everything factual. I'm going to stick to non-fiction and to the same rule of thumb that says we don't alternate, we don't dilute. Now, there is very, very conscious pre-selection in the kinds of stories we chose to put in REAL WAR STORIES. We chose to tell stories that have not been told in this medium at any other time, in any other way. I don't consider that propaganda, because you put this book on the shelf with all of the others, okay — it's just one of many, many books.

MARK: *How is REAL WAR being received?*

JOYCE: The book has been on sale for about a week and I can't find it anywhere. I just came back from New York, it sold out. That's either great or it means that people under ordered and don't understand what it's about. It's making people think. It's making people go out and ask questions and find out more. I'll tell you about one incident: Lou Ann showed copies of REAL WAR STORIES at a conference of guidance counsellors to talk about bringing it into the schools, and many of them thought because of the strong content that they would have *difficulty* bringing it in, particularly because one of the stories showed this very sadistic form of ritual hazing that they do on the submarines One of the counsellors who turned it down said that he had a client in private practice who was having difficulty adjusting after returning from the Navy, and the guy read the story and he burst into tears, started crying, and said that had happened to him. He had never told anybody about it before. So, if it's making it possible for one person to talk about it, I think the book's doing its job.

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SOUTHERN KNIGHTS #23 **Battling for his life and his sanity, young Aramis Morrow faces spirits only he can see. Are they truly spirits from his past come to destroy him? Or do they exist only in his over-stressed mind? Beyond the aid of the other Southern Knights, Aramis must fight alone against foes beyond mortal comprehension!**

by **Henry Vogel**

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"The U.S. is involved in preparing for wars all over the planet right now."

LOU ANN MERKLE

Attention readers: The single most important book you read this year may be a comic!

Lou Ann Merkle works for the Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors, (CCCO), which was founded in 1948 as a way to prepare young people for the draft. Those of you of age, I recommend contacting CCCO at the address given later in this interview.

As a comics reader, writer and editor I get a lot of my kicks observing violent struggles between good and evil. But I try to keep my eyes open also to the real-life violent struggles perpetrated every day in the name of "protecting our country."

In the course of her job, Lou Ann has met thousands of survivors of these real-life struggles, and REAL WAR STORIES is her way of bringing a handful of them to you, adopted by top writers and artists. Nothing like it has ever been done before, and it's all aimed at you, the comics reader of an age where it's not too late to make a difference. I'll let Lou Ann tell you.

MARK BORAX: *Tell me about REAL WAR STORIES. Tell me about yourself.*

LOU ANN MERKLE: I'm an artist. I studied international relations for three years and got a degree in it. Out of my love for life, I started looking at nuclear war and all of the wars of intervention going on, got really curious, and realized with all of the books I was reading I might as well just get a degree in it. So, I went to school and got a degree, graduated *cum laude* from John Carroll University in Cleveland, Ohio. What happened at that point was I was reading a *lot* of books written by the grunts in Vietnam, their personal stories. It was heartbreaking. I read where they'd be walking through the rice paddies, going through villages, and they saw the rice farmers; and they were using the highest technology weapons, you

Comics Interview

So far, there are only four titles from David Anthony Kraft's publishing company, but I like all of them.

• *MICRA* is an acronym for *M*ind *C*ontrolled *R*emote *A*utomaton. It is also one heck of a good comic book by Lamar Waldron and Ted Boonthanakit. This is a 12-issue limited series about a crippled woman who can project her consciousness into an automaton (see the title).

That is a much-too-simplified summation of a rich, complex SF novel in comic-book form. Ted's art has been compared to many different American artists (none of whose work Ted has seen; he was born in Thailand and grew up in Africa) and is remarkably clear and exciting.

Grade: A.

MICRA™
MIND CONTROLLED REMOTE AUTOMATON

• *Aristocratic X-traterrestrial Time-Traveling Thieves* (*X-Thieves* for short) has had two first issues, which is annoying to indexers and compilers of price guides, but the bright, sprightly scripts by Henry Vogel and the appropriately humorous art of Mark Propst make up for that. One of the main features of this comic book is that, like the *Mad* comic books, the panels are filled with gags, such as the crais hotline which warns, "New universe forming — disaster imminent!"

The Southern Knights make a guest appearance in the second first issue, in which the *X-Thieves* steal the formula for original Coca-Cola. This is one of the best of the funny comic books (and one of the handful that really *is* funny).

Grade: A.

X-THIEVES™

SOUTHERN KNIGHTS™

• I haven't seen the last couple of issues of *Southern Knights* yet but, unless the series has gone radically downhill since #16, this is still one of the best and most original of all the supergroups. Grade: A.

• While *Comics Interview* is not a comic book, I think I can squeeze in a recommendation. This excellent publication gives a well-rounded view of the industry, with interviews with writers, pencillers, inkers, letterers, colorists, and others.

Naturally, your interest in an issue will depend on who is being interviewed, but there have been 40 issues of *Comics Interview* and no totally dull ones — not even the *G.I. Joe* issue. Grade: A.

Four titles.
Four As. Four for four. Way to go, Dave.

— Don Thompson
COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE

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"I worked with vets in the high schools."

know, after they had been incredibly well programmed to destroy, seek out and engage. Many of the guys that fought over there had no idea what they were getting into, and when they did find out it made them *sick!* I remember laying in bed, crying and asking, "What's the problem, what's the solution?" Ignorance was the problem, the solution was education. So, I started the Draft and Military Education Project, working with veterans in the high schools. In order to counteract the RAM-BO/TOP GUN type of stuff, what we needed was experience, so I worked with vets in the high schools. Those kids would be amazed! The vets would tell them this is what napalm does, this is what a B-52 bomber does —

MARK: *These kids were in the high schools in the Ohio area?*

LOU ANN: That's right, Cleveland.

MARK: *They'd come out totally blown away when real vets told them what it was really all about?*

LOU ANN: That's absolutely right. So, I would want to leave them something, you know, but all of the literature from the peace movement is very dry, it's like wall-to-wall words. So, I put together what I considered to be the *essence* of what any kid who was going to register for the draft or enlist in the military needed; it turned out to be 250 pages. It was beautiful in a sense, it was poetry and photographs and personal statements. It was eclectic. I took clippings from newspapers, poetry from veterans, collages —

MARK: *Fiction?*

LOU ANN: No, it was more directly like either what the veterans had to say or what the peace movement had produced in terms of explaining the military. I looked at six different categories, starting with issues of conscience. Start with your heart, what is it that you're willing to do? If you're willing to kill and die — for what cause? If you're saying it's for democracy or for freedom and justice, let's get clear what you're going to deal with.

MARK: *Know what you're getting into?*

LOU ANN: That's right. And then I said let's apply conscience, we'll look at Vietnam; so I had a section on Vietnam. I also had one on Central America, since we're involved in war there. I had one on military life, what's the reality of military life.

MARK: *You did this in order to find a way to give the kids you were talking to something to take home?*

LOU ANN: Absolutely. The military spends over a billion dollars on recruiting every year, and they get 500,000 recruits a year.

MARK: *You wanted to present another side to the stuff the military was giving them?*

LOU ANN: The military message is the military is going to offer you a job and education. I always like to contrast the idea that the military is trying to say your needs are to pay for college or to get job training, because the main point is that the military has its own mission, to prepare for and engage in wars. The fact is that the United States is involved in preparing for wars all over the planet right now, like in Central America.

MARK: *Wars of intervention?*

LOU ANN: And also the nuclear war preparations. A war of intervention is when any nation intervenes in or invades another country — either by fighting by proxy, supplying arms and military advice and so on, or going in and fighting what would be a guerilla war, like Vietnam. That's going on in El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua today.

Tim Merrill found out the hard way about the truth behind the Navy's career training promises.

FINALLY, IT TOOK A COUPLE OF MONTHS SOMEBODY THOUGHT I WAS A COMMUNIST AND OTHERS COULDN'T UNDERSTAND AT ALL... BUT I GOT OUT.
SO WHAT'S YOUR IMPRESSION OF THE WHOLE EXPERIENCE? WAS IT A WASTE OF...
IT WASN'T A WASTE, NO.
I FOUND OUT MORE ABOUT MYSELF AND WHAT I BELIEVED — BUT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN IF I'D GONE IN TO LEARN A TRADE.
SONAR IS GOOD TRAINING IF YOU'RE IN THE NAVY, BUT WHERE CAN YOU USE IT IN CIVILIAN LIFE?
NOT MANY CIVILIANS WITH THEIR OWN PRIVATE FLEET OF SUBS, I IMAGINE.
RIGHT. YOU CAN GET A GOOD JOB WITH THE NAVY, BUT AT WHAT PRICE? YOU CAN GET A BETTER EDUCATION AS A CIVILIAN, AND YOU DON'T HAVE TO GIVE UP YOUR PERSONAL FREEDOMS, OR SERVE ON A WAR MACHINE — I KNOW.
YEAH, I'M MAJORING IN HISTORY PART-TIME AND WORKING ON THE SIDE. BUT THE BEST THING IS KNOWING THAT I'M STUDYING WHAT I WANT TO STUDY... ON MY OWN TERMS.
YOU'RE GOING TO SCHOOL?
THANKS FOR EVERYTHING, TIM. GOOD LUCK.
"I'M NOT THE ONE WHO NEEDS IT — NOT ANYMORE."

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Modern Romance ... *in* DOG BOY

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HIYA DOG GIRL!
HEY SWEETS! WHAT'S UP? KNOOT AND I HAVE BEEN WAITING ON YOU!
STEVE LAFLER

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"We *lost*, but were not overrun with communists."

In May, there was this Operation Solid Shield where 50,000 U.S. troops did a mock invasion of Central America; every single branch of the military was represented. This is real heavy. A lot of kids enlist thinking, "Coast Guard, that's safe, we'll patrol the waters." Or they'll enlist in the National Guard to protect their state. No way! The National Guard is in Central America all of the time. In the past four years, the United States has built or upgraded ten new air bases in Honduras, we've built roads linking the air bases, so that is our command center. From those air bases we might have placed, I think, 5,000 troops in Honduras for war games — that's what they call them.

At the same time, the Navy is patrolling the Pacific and Atlantic up and down El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala. At the same time, you've got airplanes crisscrossing the countries. The point, of course, is that we are intimidating El Salvador and Nicaragua. But for a young person, you know — see, *this* is the point — will a young person who enlists for, like, electronics training actually get that electronic training? Answer, 3.2% of the people who enlist get electronics training. Question: is that applicable to civilian life? Not necessarily, because a lot of the equipment is strictly military.

MARK: *So it's all bullshit?*

LOU ANN: Well, it's manipulation, that's what I would say. It's manipulation determined on what a young person needs. They have real needs: they really need a job, they really need an education and a way to pay for school. I've seen recruiters say to kids, "You don't want to burden your parents with the cost of college, right!" — and the kids go, "You bet, you bet!" So the military says, "We'll offer you $25,000, a scholarship!" Well, who's going to ask about Central America?

I'll tell you a story, okay. I met a guy who enlisted in the military because he wanted to become a policeman. When he got out of high school he wanted to be a policeman, but the police force wouldn't take him because he was too young, he wasn't 21 years old. The Army recruiter told him they'd give him MP training, and when he got out he'd be way ahead. So I asked, "Well, did you get your MP training?" He said yeah, he got it. And then he said, "But it's really strange, I've got MP training, but they gave me this M16 and now they've got me out in the field most of the time. I'm training in Infantry." This sort of thing happens all the time. So, we talked for awhile and, eventually, he said he'd been based in Honduras — this was before Operation Solid Shield — and he said, "It's really strange. In Tegucigalpa, the capital city, first of all you can see poverty and wealth, kind of right next to each other, and secondly there are signs everywhere that say 'Yankee Go Home, Americans Not Welcome.' If we're helping them then why don't they want us there?" That's where it clicked for me. During Vietnam the same damn thing happened.

The second thing that happened, I read a newspaper headline: U.S. TROOPS BARRED FROM BARS IN HONDURAS. That means bomb threats. The first thing they're going to do is try to talk to you, "Please leave us alone." The second thing they're going to do is they're going to kill you. And, it's these young people who are enlisting for jobs who are going to have to pay the price.

The third thing that's going on down there, then, is a few months later I saw that U.S. troops are ferrying Honduran troops to the border with Nicaragua, where the Contras are lined up. These young kids who joined up to get a job are getting embroiled in this war.

That's what REAL WAR STORIES is about, and we haven't even gotten to the point yet. To me, the question isn't how many weapons do the Russians have and how many weapons do we have, or how many weapons do the Sandanistas have and how many do we have — the question is what is the war about. *Why?* Why

IS OF MY CLOSEST FRIENDS HAD "DISAPPEARED." THEY NEVER SHOWED UP ALIVE AGAIN. TWO KIDS I GREW UP WITH WERE DRAGGED OUT OF THEIR HOUSES. THEY WERE LEFT ALMOST UNRECOGNIZABLE, HORRIBLY TORTURED, THEIR THROATS SLIT.

© 1987 Bissonnet, Yeates & Johnston

"More Vietnam vets have committed suicide

are we fighting? We need to ask that question very genuinely. The Vietnam War showed us that fighting doesn't solve anything. We *lost* that war and we were *not* overrun with communists. We were the invaders, you know.

MARK: *What would you have instead of the current military-industrial complex? What would you put in its place?*

LOU ANN: I would use our wealth, our talent, our resources, for alleviating the suffering in the world. If people are hungry in El Salvador — and their children *are* starving to death — I would want to work to make sure that they owned their own land, so they could grow their own crops, so they could feed their children.

MARK: *Instead of making the country Uncle Sam's benevolent nieces and nephews, depending on us for handouts, setting it up so that they can take care of themselves?*

LOU ANN: Well, there is a myth, you know, that says they need to be taken care of. The fact of the matter is, in El Salvador, for instance, fourteen families own like 98% of the land — 2% of the people. The rest of the people go out and work on the land, they grow coffee, sugar, bananas for export. A few people are getting rich while these people's kids starve to death. What they want is land reform. So, they organize for land reform, and a military that the United States trained goes out and kills them. That's real hard to believe, but it's the truth. I just saw on TV the other night that Ford Motor Company moved a plant out of Michigan — bad union labor there where the people were getting $20 an hour — they moved it to Mexico where the people make less than a dollar an hour. *That's* what it's about! It's about U.S. companies. So, people get unemployed here, and when they're unemployed they join the military, and they go down and they kill these people who *also* don't want to work for that pittance.

MARK: *So, you're saying they take the jobs away and people have no place to work, they join up and wind up protecting the plants where the jobs are, from the people there who don't want to be exploited.*

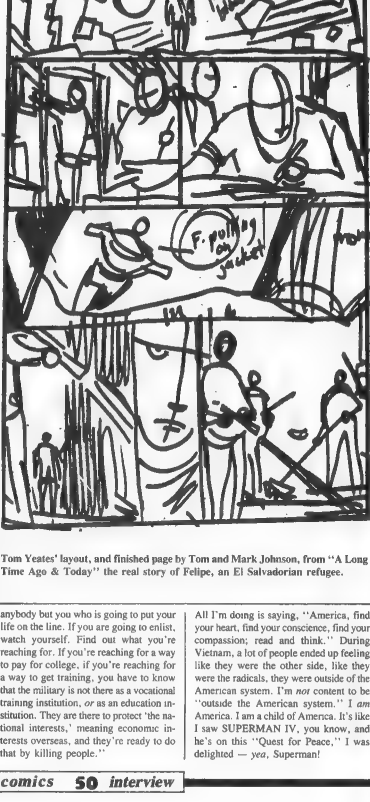
LOU ANN: That's right.

MARK: *You see it as a destructive cycle that reinforces itself.*

LOU ANN: That's right.

MARK: *And you envision REAL WAR STORIES as a little drop in the bucket to try and offset that cycle in some way?*

LOU ANN: I'm saying to young people: "It is not your parents, it is not the recruiters, it is not your teachers, it is not anybody but you who is going to put your life on the line. If you are going to enlist, watch yourself. Find out what you're reaching for. If you're reaching for a way to pay for college, if you're reaching for a way to get training, you have to know that the military is not there as a vocational training institution, *or* as an education institution. They are there to protect 'the national interests,' meaning economic interests overseas, and they're ready to do that by killing people."



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Tom Yeates' layout, and finished page by Tom and Mark Johnson, from "A Long Time Ago & Today" the real story of Felipe, an El Salvadorian refugee.

All I'm doing is saying, "America, find your heart, find your conscience, find your compassion; read and think." During Vietnam, a lot of people ended up feeling like they were the other side, like they were the radicals, they were outside of the American system. I'm *not* content to be "outside the American system." I *am* America. I am a child of America. It's like I saw SUPERMAN IV, you know, and he's on this "Quest for Peace," I was delighted — *yea*, Superman!

than were killed in the Vietnam War."

© 1987 Bridner, Yates & Johnson

PEOPLE CAME FROM ALL OVER TO GATHER IN THE PLAZA AND I STOPPED THERE ON MY WAY HOME FROM SCHOOL.
I STAYED TO LISTEN UNTIL AFTER DARK.
DINNER WAS READY TWO HOURS AGO, FELIPE.
SORRY.
AT DAWN WE HEARD TREMENDOUS SHOOTING MACHINE GUN FIRE FROM DOWNTOWN.
EVERYTHING WAS QUIET DOWN THE STREETS THE NEXT DAY.

We are for justice, we are one planet, and we can be inspired by the things like "We Are the World." Let's feed the hungry. Let's use our wealth and our talent to care for each other.

I guess I got really moved because I'm an artist and I have a lot of empathy. I don't know if I'm different from most people, but when I look at a film and I see a bullet go into somebody, I cry.

I read a story about Vietnam where these guys were pinned down in an ambush in a rice paddy. The medic was ripping up his fatigues to make bandages, and it was in the monsoon season so it was a drenching downpour, and then night fell and the snipers kept them pinned down all night. They described the scene where there were just sucking leaches all over their bodies, and they are these beautiful, young, strong, idealistic American kids who knew *nothing* about why they were killing rice farmers, but it was their legs that were blown to bits, it was they who were dying. I remember reading that and thinking, "This medic is going to give every ounce of energy he has, rip up his clothes to the ? degree, and what is the American public going to do in terms of extending itself?" Those kids should not have to be in that rice paddy killing other people unless there was a good reason for it, and the fact was there was no good reason. Another reason why I do this work is that over 60,000 veterans have committed suicide since their return home, that's more than died in Vietnam.

MARK: *Your saying more Vietnam vets have committed suicide than were killed in the Vietnam War?*

LOU ANN: That's right. There are a lot of people who argue about the statistics, and with the military keeping the statistics — the VA — it's very hard to prove; but in my personal work on the local level I can't tell you how many times I've been to the hospital visiting guys who have attempted suicide, or have worked with people whose friends or relatives have committed suicide. It's not uncommon.

MARK: *What is your official title at the Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors?*

LOU ANN: Youth Outreach Program Director.

MARK: *So, you're still doing what you started out doing in Ohio in the high schools, but on a larger level now?*

LOU ANN: Yes. The neat thing is that all across the country people are doing this. Just out of being driven out of my own heart, from seeing the militarism just dragging another generation into war, I said no and worked with vets to go into the schools to talk to kids, and I thought I was the *only* person doing that. I got on the national level and discovered there's over 200 groups springing up all across the country. Veterans For Peace, Inc. has branches in, like, 30 states. Vietnam Vets Against the War — they're constantly going to the schools. It's like with whatever resources they've got people are saying, "Please wake up, there's an ambush up ahead!"

MARK: *So CCCO is one of the 200 groups?*

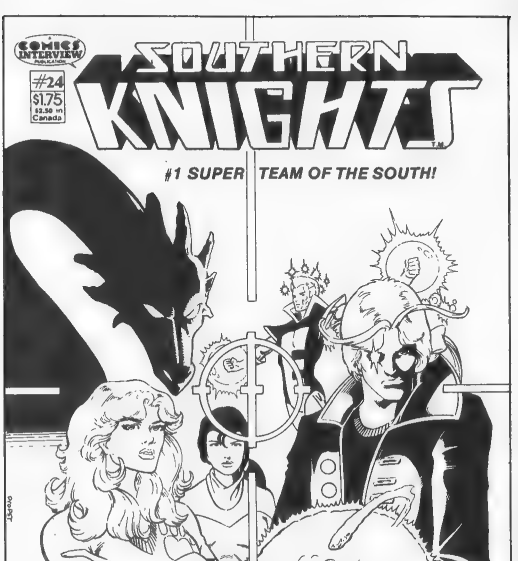
LOU ANN: CCCO is a national organization, what I'm talking about here are local groups.

MARK: *Does CCCO help to coordinate any of these activities?*

LOU ANN: Yes. I see my job as two things. I produce literature and resources to support the local people in conveying these messages that the military is not about jobs and education, it's about making war; and there is another way, peace is the way. The other thing I do is networking, so all of the other veterans groups and educators and peace activists groups around the country doing this kind of work have a place to come together and help each other.

MARK: *Is it growing?*

LOU ANN: The movement is growing on



SOUTHERN KNIGHTS #24 **Zephyr Flint, head of VIPER, suddenly finds himself at the wrong end of an assassin's rifle. Knowing no one else he can turn to for protection, Flint goes to his enemies, the Southern Knights! But Flint isn't the only one from the Knights' past to pop up! Synergy, the assassins Carl & Larry, and Serpent form the strangest team in comics history — all in SOUTHERN KNIGHTS #24!**

by Henry Vogel

COMICS INTERVIEW PUBLICATION FICTIONEER BOOKS, LTD. • 234 FIFTH AVE. • SUITE 301 • NEW YORK, NY 10001

LOU ANN MERKLE

"Kiss your mom good-bye, that's it."

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local levels, regionally and nationally, in various cross-constituencies of conscientious objection, veterans organizations, Central America activists and so on. In 1988, we're going to be having a national consultation, where we'll get to know one another, and then we'll break up into regional conferences, where we'll *share* with each other the kinds of programs we're doing, determine what our needs are, do some training, and develop materials. There's curricula developed that look at the militarism and alternatives. We're not satisfied with using violence as a way of solving problems, because we know the problems are about hunger, about justice, about self-determination. The people of El Salvador and Nicaragua are just like us, they don't want someone telling them how to run their country, and we have to respect that. Otherwise we're going to die, and they're going to die.

CCCO's actual roots are conscientious objection, so it's centered around the draft. In 1980, when **Jimmy Carter** reinstituted draft registration, most young people had no idea what the draft was. Because it was just signing your name, it's like a bureaucratic process, why worry about it.

MARK: *Also, when they were having kids apply for financial aid at colleges, they were having to sign little things that said . . . what was it, something about if they were drafted they would go?*

LOU ANN: No, you had to prove that you had registered for the draft, or you couldn't get financial aid.

MARK: *That seems really unconstitutional.*

LOU ANN: It is. It's punishment before you've been tried.

MARK: *Do those kids have the right to still get that financial aid without having to sign that?*

LOU ANN: No. The way it is today, you have to have registered for the draft or you don't get financial aid for college, you can't get a civil service job, you can't participate in job training programs.

MARK: *God, that's blackmail.*

LOU ANN: It is, that's exactly what it is. The worst part is that it breaks down people's will to deal with it. Many young people look at it and shrug their shoulders and say, "Well, I have to do it." The Selective Service has an ad campaign that says, "Registration, it's quick, it's easy, it's the law." They have another one that says, "What's behind draft registration?" And they literally say, "Nothing." *That's* why on the back cover of REAL WAR STORIES we got **Joey Cavalieri** and **Paul Mavrides** to draw out this incredible strip which shows that if the President were to declare a draft today, in as little as ten days, if you receive your mailgram telling you to report for induction, you could be on your way to boot camp. Kiss your mom good-bye, that is it.

WINNING
IT'S EASY! IT'S FAST! IT'S REAL!
ENTER OUR FABULOUS LOTTERY SWEEPSTAKES AND CHANGE YOUR LIFE IN JUST 14 DAYS!
THE BIG GIVEAWAY
DRAFT
DO DON'T DON'T ENTER

Joey Cavalieri and Paul Mavrides show their feelings about what's behind draft registration.

MARK: *You could be getting shot at in two months.*

LOU ANN: Yes! And the Selective Service says they cannot provide *any* information about the system and the alternatives. You have rights, you have options, but no one knows what they are! If you received a mailgram, okay, at *that* moment you would have to send in your papers. Where do you get your papers? What papers are you talking about? Most people have no idea. It *should* be at the post office. Is it at the post office? No. Why? They can't afford it, they say — but they can afford to advertise, "What's behind draft registration? Nothing."

That kind of misleading, manipulating approach to young people *totally* disregards the fact that these people are the ones who are going to be losing their lives, and for what?

LOU ANN MERKLE

"He didn't want to join a military making

IF I REGISTER I'LL BE HELPING TO PREPARE FOR WAR. I CANNOT PARTICIPATE IN ANY WAY, NOT EVEN BY SIGNING A PIECE OF PAPER.
AND SO IT CAME TO BE...
MISTER MAGER, YOU VIOLATED THE LAW. ARE YOU AWARE YOU COULD GO TO PRISON FOR THREE YEARS?
SURE.

The story of Andy Mager, depicted by Denny O'Neil and Steve Leialoha. Andy spent time in prison for draft resisting. Since 1980, hundreds of thousands of others have not registered, either — but only twenty have been indicted.

© 1987 Leialoha & O'Neil

MARK: *So let's say I get the letter and I'm in the draft, what could I do instead of going along with it?*

LOU ANN: If you've registered for the draft — that's the only way you would receive your mailgram — the minute you receive it, it's going to say that you're classified available for military service. If you want to be reclassified, you have to fill in these forms that you have to get at the post office. The first thing you should do is find a draft counsellor, because you need help.

MARK: *How do you find one?*

LOU ANN: Write to CCCO. 2208 South St., Philadelphia, PA 19146, or P.O. Box 42249, San Francisco, CA 94142.

MARK: *Do priests and rabbis and others know about these things?*

LOU ANN: Yes. A lot of people who were around during the Vietnam War *might* have kept up on it. The laws are constantly changing, they're still changing today, and the regulations are still a mess.

MARK: *So, the first thing you do is get a draft counsellor?*

LOU ANN: Absolutely, because it's downright complicated. You've got to find somebody who is going to work it through with you. Now, Selective Service is *supposed* to have what's called the INFORMATION FOR REGISTRANTS booklet. It's supposed to be at the post office. They're not there now because they're in the middle of rewriting the regulations. They used to have what was called Form 9 in that booklet, and *that* is the form you would fill out for reclassification. It tells you what your rights and options are — CO status, medical, sole surviving son, different things. But each one is very specific, you know. A lot of people think if you are the only son then you can get out, but that's not true. Your father or mother or brother had to have died as a result of military service, so it's more complicated.

MARK: *What if I just don't want to register for the draft? What are my options?*

LOU ANN: Well, we already mentioned that if you don't register, you don't get financial aid for college. There are people raising money to support "non-registrants." The point is — whether you go into the military, whether you register for the draft, whether you don't register — you have to pay the price.

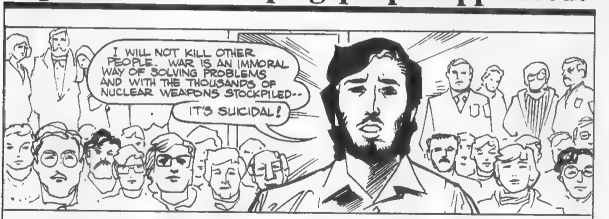
MARK: *So, you might as well investigate the options?*

LOU ANN: That's right. Well over a half-a-million young people *haven't* registered for the draft; only 18 have been prosecuted. The longest prison sentence was six months. They don't want to prosecute young people, what they want is to get you to sign up. Without question, they want to stifle dissent, they want to stifle resistance. They want to get you to go. "It's too much hassle to pay attention to this, it's only bureaucratic, I'm just signing my name, it's no big deal," shrug your shoulders and go on with your life. Bam, the draft happens and you're sucked into it before you know it. You're dead meat. If we stay ignorant, we pay the price.

MARK: *Really what you're talking about are ways in which people don't have to give their power away, they can take the power back.*

LOU ANN: It's about being strong. We're strong enough in this country, we're wealthy enough, we don't have to rely on the cheap labor of other people in order to be content. Also, young people get out of high school and wonder how they're going to pay for college, or they don't really know what they want to do with their lives, and the military is right there saying they'll build your self-esteem, let you be all that you can be. Know that it's already in your heart, the military can't give that to you. *Nobody* can give that to you; you have to live it. If you give over your power to the military, you're going

a profit off of keeping people oppressed."


I WILL NOT KILL OTHER PEOPLE. WAR IS AN IMMORAL WAY OF SOLVING PROBLEMS AND WITH THE THOUSANDS OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS STOCKPILED--
IT'S SUICIDAL!

to be in their hands 24 hours a day for eight years. So what are you afraid of?

MARK: *How is REAL WAR STORIES working out?*

LOU ANN: I got a phone call the other night from a young man who saw REAL WAR STORIES and he picked it up and he read it, he called at ten in the evening and we talked for an hour and a half. He told me that he had been wanting to enlist for the past five years — he's like 17 years old — the recruiters were in his school and some of his best friends had just enlisted, and he had taken the tests and was ready to go. And he said he got REAL WAR STORIES and he *read* it, and then he said he reread it and reread it and reread it. He kept reading it, because he just couldn't believe it. He would read the **Tim Merrill** story, "The Elite of the Fleet," and he'd say, "Well, I'm not a black guy and I'm not going to enlist in the Navy so that story doesn't apply to me." He'd read Nancy's story and he'd say, "Well, I'm not a woman so that story doesn't apply to me." He'd read the Vietnam story and say, "Ah, that was Vietnam, that has *nothing* to do with me. The war is over, I'm not going to worry about that." And then he realized that he was just *rationalizing* for himself, but the fact was that the comic book was making him think.

What he told me was that he really cared about people, and he said it was very scary to him, what we were saying. In the Vietnam story **Bill Ehrhart** comes right out and bluntly says that the information that he had based his decision on had been bad information. You know, he talked about THE PENTAGON PAPERS coming out, saying that the American people had been lied to, and that he felt he had been sent by murderers and liars to kill rice farmers. He really trusted his government and he put himself on the line, and he ended up going to Vietnam and having to kill that kid with the hand grenade, and he still has troubled memories of that.

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I'M PROUD TO BE HERE AND STANDING UP FOR WHAT I BELIEVE IN.
I ASK YOU TO BREAK OUT OF YOUR NORMAL BOUNDRIES AND CREATE THE CHANGES NECESSARY FOR A WORLD OF PEACE AND JUSTICE.
I AGREE THAT THE LAW IS, PERHAPS, WRONG.
NEVERTHELESS, THE LAW DOES NOT RECOGNIZE RELIGIOUS OR MORAL CONVICTIONS OR ADHERENCE TO SOME KIND OF "HIGHER LAW" AS JUSTIFICATION FOR COMMITTING A CRIME.
G MUNSON
Judge

THE BEST COMIC OF THE '80s?

LOVE AND ROCKETS

"The pure and essential crackle of comicbooks at their best runs through these pages. Accept no substitutes."
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1985 Jaime Hernandez

"We *owe* our kids better than that."

So REAL WAR STORIES was making this young man ask questions: "Why is America at war? What are we doing?" If we're not protecting these people, if we're not helping them, what then are we doing? Reading the El Salvador story made him ask those kinds of questions. So, we talked for an hour and a half. I got a letter from his mother today, with a $100 donation, and that made my day, right. *(Laughter.)* But what she wrote was.

"I would like to thank you for speaking to my son the other night, I feel it was an answered prayer that he read your comic book and spoke with you. I feel that you've *rescued* him from something that would have destroyed him. You're the first person he's listened to. Friends and relatives have told him that he's crazy for wanting to join the Army, but he wouldn't listen. My husband and I have had to be very careful in how we handled the situation. We knew why he wanted to join the service" — and then she goes on for three pages, telling me what it was that led him to want to enlist in the military, and how hard it was for him.

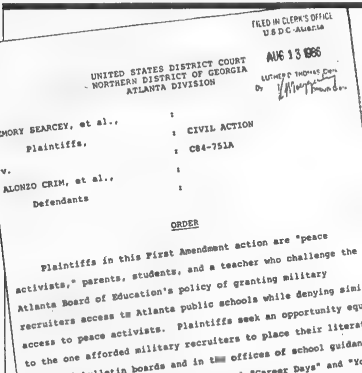
I'm just really grateful that he was able to read the book and come to understand what it was about. I think the biggest issue for him was his love for his country, and was it really possible that our politics and our military are mercenary, that we're really killing for profit. In the comic book, we're very point blank when we talk about, you know, U.S. corporations having investments in Central America. And he said, "I love my country, is it really true that I would be joining a mercenary military?" He didn't want to be a mercenary. He would defend principles, and if people needed him, if they were really threatened by an oppressor, he would be there to help them, but he sure didn't want to join a military that was making a profit off of keeping people oppressed. That really gave him something to think about. And I told him that there was no way he should stop at what this comic book said or what I had to say. I told him that he should get out there and read some books on *all* sides — whether it was books that I would recommend to him, or whether it was books that **President Reagan** would recommend to him; that he should get out there and read as much as he can, because if he puts that uniform on, his life is going to be on the line. One of the things that *delights* me about this comic book is it is America at its best, from my perspective. If we have freedom of speech, freedom of the press, if we believe in justice and liberty for all — I feel like that's what REAL WAR STORIES is about. We did our research, we did our homework, absolutely everything in that book is true. They're real stories and they're backed up. It's not just one person's story, there are literally millions of people that have lived through this stuff. I know because I spend a lot of my time talking with veterans.

I talked to this guy the other day, he was in charge of a platoon in Vietnam, and he said they'd go into these villages and the village leader and his wife would come out and literally do *anything* to get those troops out of their village. He said, "Pardon me for saying this, but they'd come out and suck my dick to get us off their land." You know, here we are a bunch of barbarians with high technology.

He said after three months he knew what that war was about, and it wasn't about protecting people. You know, we were told that there were people infiltrating, but the people that he was around he said had never travelled more than ten miles outside of their village, and they were defending their homes. So, these American kids who thought they were defending something, became invaders instead, and that's a really heavy thing to put a kid through — to tell them that they are defending something when, in fact, they are going to be turned into an invader.

We *owe* our kids better than that

"We are in court to defend the Atlanta Peace



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UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF GEORGIA
ATLANTA DIVISION

EMORY SEARCEY, et al.,
Plaintiffs,

v.

ALONZO CRIM, et al.,
Defendants

CIVIL ACTION

C84-751A

ORDER

Plaintiffs in this First Amendment action are "peace activists," parents, students, and a teacher who challenge the Atlanta Board of Education's policy of granting military recruiters access to Atlanta public schools while denying similar access to peace activists. Plaintiffs seek an opportunity equal to the one afforded military recruiters to place their literature on school bulletin boards and in the offices of school guidance counselors and to participate in school "Career Days" and "Youth Motivation Days." Presently before the Court are motions for summary judgment and for partial summary judgment filed by plaintiffs, defendants, and the United States as intervenor-defendant.

For the reasons that follow, the Court concludes that defendants have violated plaintiffs' First Amendment rights and,

JIM FELDMAN

While we were putting this issue together, we heard that REAL WAR STORIES had gone to court. That news, in and of itself, was not particularly surprising, given the nature of the comic and the passions it was designed to arouse — which is not to say that anyone expected REAL WAR to be involved in a court trial.

DARREL L. BOATZ: *I'm speaking with Jim Feldman, staff attorney for the Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors, who is representing REAL WAR STORIES in court. I don't even know what this trial is really about, so what's it all about?*

JAMES H. FELDMAN, JR.: Since about 1983, a group in Atlanta called the Atlanta Peace Alliance has been trying to present information about the military to students in the Atlanta public schools. They made a proposal to the Superintendent, which was accepted, but when news of this became public the ATLANTA JOURNAL came out with a strong editorial opposing the Atlanta Peace Alliance. Once this happened, it became a hot political subject, and the school board decided that the Atlanta Peace Alliance could not present any information to students, at all. At that point, the Peace Alliance contacted an attorney here in Atlanta, **Raiph Goldberg,** who contacted me to help out on the case, and we filed a lawsuit against the Atlanta School Board saying that the Atlanta Peace Alliance's First Amendment rights had been violated, since they would let the military talk about the military, but they wouldn't let the Atlanta Peace Alliance talk about the military. Several years later, we finally got a partial ruling on the case: the judge ruled that the Atlanta Peace Alliance *could* present information to students about alternative careers, careers that did not involve the military or killing, but they couldn't *criticize* the military. So we are in court this week, and last week, to try that issue. In other words, we are presenting evidence to the judge that we think shows we have a right to criticize the military, as well. And one of the pieces of material that we want students to see is REAL WAR STORIES. That's how REAL WAR STORIES is in court.

DARREL: *It is just a facet of this whole trial, then?*

JIM: The trial is not about REAL WAR STORIES only — but REAL WAR STORIES is a part of the case.

DARREL: *So, the ATLANTA JOURNAL did this editorial. What was their reasoning against the Atlanta Peace Alliance talking to students?*

JIM: Essentially, what they said was that they believed that the Atlanta Peace Alliance was only going to be distributing propaganda to students. They felt that there wasn't any such thing as careers in peacemaking, or the only careers in peacemaking that they knew of were in the Pentagon, and that's what military recruiters were there doing, and they felt that it was wrong that the school board should allow any group like the Atlanta Peace Alliance to say anything. They felt that the only information students should get about the military was from the military itself. They wanted a real one-sided point of view to be presented to students. *That's* what the whole point of this case is, to get the truth to young people about the military; and that's the whole purpose of REAL WAR STORIES, as well. We want people to hear the truth.

If you were going to buy an automobile, you would go to CONSUMER REPORTS and try to find out all of the facts about each automobile and make sure you were

Alliance's First Amendment rights."

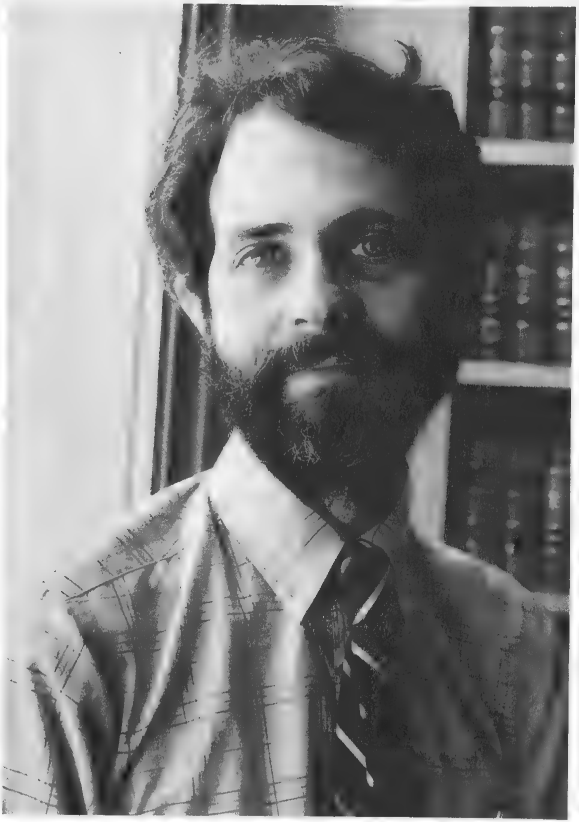

Photo: Zachary Coffin

"Military promises aren't worth much."

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getting a decent car. If you got all of your information from the car manufacturers, there would be no way you could make an informed decision, because they have a vested interest in selling you a car. It's the same way with the military, they have a vested interest in recruiting you. Recruiters get bonuses, they get promoted and so on, based on how many people they recruit. It's not in their interest to let you know the full story.

I'm not *faulting* them on that. I think it's human nature to act that way, and that's why we need people like the Atlanta Peace Alliance and publications like REAL WAR STORIES to let people know what this military is all about, so that they can make an informed decision — their own choice. The military presents a picture that tells people that the military is a place to get a job, a place to get job training, a place to get an education. But that's not the main purpose of the military. The purpose of the military is to prepare for and fight wars. People need to know that, and they need to know how that affects the military's ability to actually train them for jobs that would be useful to them. And I think REAL WAR STORIES and a lot of the other material does that

DARREL: *So, your position basically is that people who go into the military should go into it knowing the truth, that their reason for going into the military should be because they believe in it, believe they have a cause worth defending, worth fighting for, worth killing and dying for — and not because they want job training or an education?*

JIM: That's right. This is a relatively new phenomenon, the military recruiting people based upon what people can get out of the military. It wasn't until after Vietnam that the military began doing this. The "Uncle Sam Wants You," serve your country, the call for self sacrifice in the service of your country, that's what they used to tell people — it wasn't a way to get a job or an education — and they really need to get back to that. The military should be taking that approach. I don't think the military has changed significantly, but what's changed is this entire big ticket, Madison Ave., ad agency approach to selling the military. The military hasn't changed, what's changed is their image.

DARREL: *We don't see the Uncle Sam pointing his finger "I Want You" poster any more.*

JIM: Not very much.

DARREL: *Well, REAL WAR STORIES– I've read it a couple of times — Is somewhat critical of the military. It doesn't just present alternative ways to go.*

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WE WANT BREAD AND WE WANT OUR LIVES TO BE RESPECTED. WHEN WE DEMAND THESE THINGS, THEY ANSWER US WITH DEATH.

JIM: That's right.

DARREL: *That's central to the issue of this trial, because it is partisan to the views of conscientious objectors.*

JIM: That's right. It *is* critical of the military, but people see positive messages about the military all of the time. Not every piece of literature has to be balanced. But, I think that if students hear from the recruiters and also read REAL WAR STORIES and hear other information that tells the downside of the military, they get a complete picture, and then they have the information that they need to make an informed decision. The Atlanta Peace Alliance isn't saying that recruiters shouldn't be in schools. They are saying that *since* they are in schools, students need to get other information, as well.

I should say that also, pretty soon after this case was filed, the United States government intervened in the case. They were not sued, they weren't an original party to the case, but the U.S. government came into the case, saying that if the Atlanta Peace Alliance was allowed to do what they were saying they wanted to do — go into the schools — then national security would be threatened

DARREL: *What?*

JIM: They think that if young people hear the truth, they may not want to enlist, and therefore it would be more difficult to recruit people into the military.

DARREL: *Well, that would seem to be a real stretch of defining national security needs.*

JIM: That's true. But, they're not saying they're actually afraid of the message that the Atlanta Peace Alliance wants to give out. What they are saying is that they are afraid that *if* the Atlanta Peace Alliance is allowed to come into schools, the schools would cut back on the number of times they let recruiters come in. I think there's no basis for that kind of a conclusion, because in Atlanta 20% of the graduating seniors go into the military, so the school board is not going to restrict recruiters, it's too important to the schools. I think that that's a red herring. I think the real issue *is* the message, which the government would like to stop.

DARREL: *So, by extension then, the government is saying that REAL WAR STORIES, which is "honest stories, straight from the people who lived them," is dangerous to the military and shouldn't be allowed reading in schools?*

JIM: The government did challenge the accuracy of the book in two scenes. One was the "greasing" scene in "Elite of the Fleet," claiming that rape is much less frequent in the military than in civilian life That may be true, but certainly that kind of rape, rape of a man by other men, I think is a lot less frequent in civilian life. The other thing they had an objection to was in "False Note," Nancy's story; it showed that she had been in the Airborne, and they don't allow women in the Airborne. That may be true today, but the story took place back in the '70s when they did allow women in the Airborne.

DARREL: *So, they're saying it didn't happen?*

JIM: Well, they're putting up another red herring. They're saying that can't happen now, and that's true; but who knows, in the future they may allow women in the Airborne again. They can change the rules in the military very quickly and something that isn't allowed one day *can* be allowed the next day. And that's one of the things we're trying to let people know — that promises from the military aren't worth very much. All it takes is for the military to change its rules and the promise is worthless. That's in the contract, itself.

The contract itself says that there are no guarantees.

LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

TO KELLY NICHOLS: A CALIFORNIA COME-ON

Dear Dave:

Oh boy . . . I made the cover! Sucha deal! And really ironic, too, since at the time my interview showed up in C.I., I was doing free-lance layouts and assistant animation on an upcoming PEANUTS special. (''It's Freedom, Charlie Brown!''). Now is that a co-inky dink or WHAT?

The REALLY funny thing tho was how many things I talked about in comics THEN have bloomed into topics of full flower SINCE then: **Shooter, Kirby,** Marvel Trademarks, DC's quality, Jonny Quest, Space Ghost, etc. Now is that Precognitization or WHAT?

One major correction I have to make: **Art SKYLES** is actually **Art SCOTT** a really dear man and the one responsible for getting me into H-B in the first place. (Now Bill and Joe know who to blame!). And NO, he didn't REALLY fire me 'cause of the perverse things my dollies did. HE KNEW I wuz innocent. (Yeah. Right! Is that blowing smoke or WHAT?)

Oh, and before I close . . . a very important message to a fellow interviewee: re my comments about wrestling . . to **Kelly Nichols** (C.I. #13), anytime y'wanna get together for a fall or two, babe. . . .

(Now is THAT a California come-on OR WHAT????)

Darrell McNeil
President/producer
Gold Medal Productions, Inc.
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MARIO & LUIGI

Dear David,

The piece on **Jeff MacNelly** in #46 continued your occasional forays out of the ''comic book'' world in CI. This is fine as far as it goes, though I would like to see such pieces tied back at least a *bit* to comic books — such as by finding out the subject's experiences and viewpoints with respect to comic books, perhaps in contrast with his own chosen medium. Also, I missed the personal interaction of a true interview in this case. Taking **MacNelly's** comments from a speech and question-and-answer session robbed the piece of a proper flow and depth.

I also enjoyed the second part of the **Richard Bruning/Bob Rozakis** interview. And hopefully it will contribute at least a little bit to the return of 'MAZING MAN! Mentioned in the interview was the problem of finding the right audience for MM—ie. finding the proper format to reach the audience that would really appreciate him. Maybe it's time to try something a little bit different! Maybe MM comic books could be enclosed with the various products used by the sorts of people who would identify with the various characters in the series! Like disposable diapers (for young married couples), six-packs of beer or six-packs of motor oil (for the young macho type), boxes of pet food (for the people who don't buy disposable diapers) and, well, you get the idea, I guess! What about people like 'Mazing Man himself, you say? Um, how about a comic book insert to be sent out with publishers' sweepstakes letters?! (Or maybe **Ed McMahon** could hand them out personally!) Of course, ''people like 'Mazing Man'' could be a market audience of one!

The **Art Adams** interview was a good look at a rising young star of whom I knew little personally before this. But say, is it really *nice* to call him a ''gumby artist''?! Oh, you mean an artist who *drew* Gumby! Never mind. . .

Finally, I was interested in your ''next issue'' blurb in which you said that CI is the ''first choice of Cognoscenti!'' Do you refer to Mario Cognoscenti, or perhaps to his brother Luigi (who is far more critical and thus it would be far more impressive if it *was* him!)?

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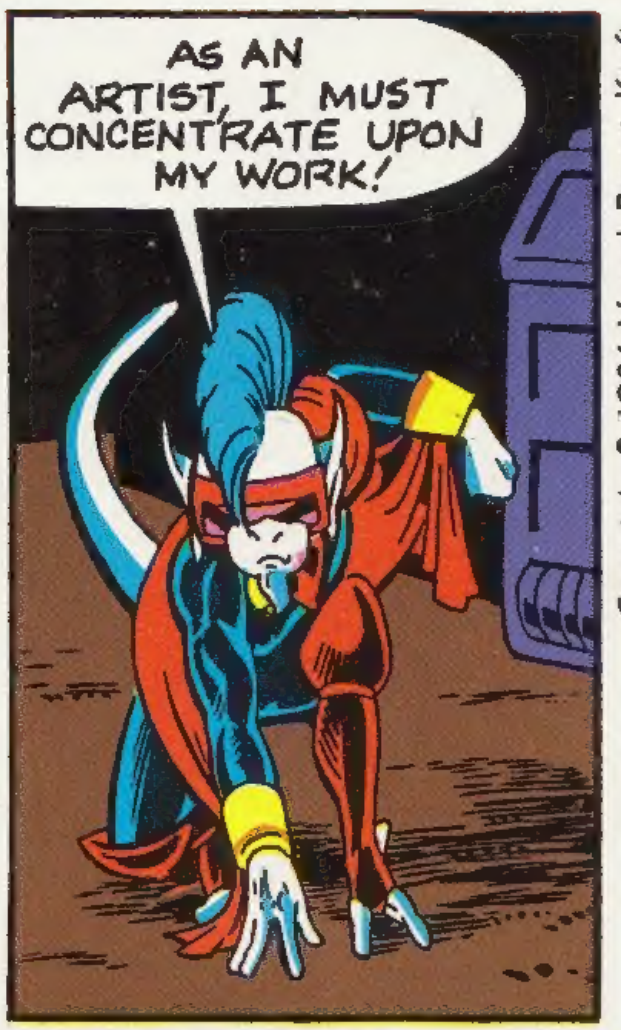

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